

Public Duties *and* Private Obligations

*Networking and Personalisation
of Relations in Ukraine*



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Front page illustration: '*Portrait of Roman the Salesman*'

Background picture taken from www.razom.com.ua

Abstract

This is a study of networking and personalisation of relations. In four cases I show how my Ukrainian informants use their personal networks to get better quality service and spend less time in encounters with an impersonal bureaucracy, such as medical healthcare. When personal links to bureaucratic services are missing, relations with an official can be personalised by giving some kind of personal gift, and thereby create a reciprocal debt. Being in a reciprocal relationship, the official must render a service not only according to his or her professional duties, but also according to personal obligations. In one of the cases I analyse how giving an official a bottle of alcohol underlines symbolically such aspects like personal friendship, generosity and trust.

Networking and the personalisation of relations would in a Western formalistic context most likely be called corrupt practices. However, the analysis is placed within a framework of the Soviet past, where obtaining scarce goods through personal networks, known as *blat*, was a way of coping with the Soviet 'economy of scarcity'. Further, I analyse networking and the personalisation of relations from an anthropological perspective, and thus base the analysis on my informants' own valuations of their acts. Through a short review of the public discourse on corruption in Ukrainian mass media, I emphasise that taking a cultural perspective also demands an acknowledgement of the fact that there are many 'natives' and just as many 'points of views'. The aim is therefore not to reach any definition of corruption, but rather to point at some of the problems involved when categorising different acts as corrupt.

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Introduction

"Ukraine is one giant experiment to see how people survive without work and money. Then they will show Europe how one should not live"

(Roman the Salesman, informant)

The initial idea for this fieldwork was to investigate how people in the post-socialist Ukraine manage to survive on an average official wage of \$95 a month. Walking the streets of Lviv, a Western Ukrainian city that was the site of my research for 5 months in the spring 2004, I was struck by the huge contrast in material wealth among the population, as poor street beggars were just as plentiful as fancily-dressed *bizniz*-men in black Mercedes. The majority of the city's population, however, showed consumption patterns somewhere in between these two extremes.

During the fieldwork the focus changed somewhat, and I concentrated more on two specific and interrelated aspects in the everyday lives of my informants; *networking* and *personalisation of relations*. The attention is directed towards my informants' encounters with an impersonal bureaucratic system, and the means that are employed to make these encounters more personal. By personalising the bureaucracy, citizens can avoid queuing and get better quality service. The bureaucrat thus treats the citizen according to personal obligations rather than public duties.

By networking I mean the active use of one's personal network to achieve some goal or acquire some good of need or desire. As will be shown in three of the cases, networking permeates a number of different activities, including seeking medical healthcare or getting a passport. When I use personalisation of relations I mean the effort to expand one's personal network in places where it does not exist, by commencing reciprocal relationships. The use of gifts is central here, which in a Western context most probably would be regarded as corruption. I will, however, analyse these features in a context of the specific Soviet system, which makes labelling them as corruption an ambiguous task. The point of view is thus how the informants themselves value their

actions, and not how these same actions fit into some predefined conception of corruption. The analysis will also be linked to a more general discourse on corruption in the Ukrainian mass media.

The framework for the analysis is two interconnected legacies of the Soviet system: the specific distinction between public and private, and the institution of *blat*. As will be shown, political repression and chronic scarcity of goods resulted in an emphasis on the private, both as a source of friendship and trust, and also as a means to obtain scarce resources by the use of *blat*- or network connections.

Introduction to the field site

Lviv is a regional centre in Western Ukraine and has about three quarters of a million inhabitants. Being a medieval city with many cultural influences, the city centre offers a beautiful and somewhat mystical cacophony of architectural styles, churches and cathedrals of different religious congregations, and monuments from various political and historical epochs (see illustrations 1-5; p.87-8).¹ Narrow streets are constantly crowded with fast moving people carrying plastic bags from 'Gordon', 'Lidl' or some other foreign company. Along sidewalks older women with wrinkled hands, wearing warm coats and colourful headscarves, sell home grown flowers and vegetables (see illustration 6; p.89). Others have placed bathroom scales covered with transparent plastic in front of them, offering their services for 10 kopecks to people passing by. The constant humming of the sidewalk crowds is drowned by the noise of wheels screaming against the brick road and old yellow and red trams lurching towards the next stop. Packed trams take people from the city centre to its outskirts. People going to the more distant suburbs usually take one of the countless *marshrutkas*², that is, small buses going on certain routes and run by private firms (see illustration 7-8; p.89-90). Looking out the window of a *marshrutka* as you go from the centre to the suburbs is like travelling in a time machine; passing fragments of the city wall of the medieval principality of Halychyna, through narrow streets being squeezed from both sides by solid stone buildings of the Austrian-Hungarian empire, upwards to the neighbourhoods of fancy private houses, built by Polish aristocrats a century ago, further on to the more recently

built Soviet style buildings in the suburbs. Beyond the suburbs the *selo* (the countryside) begins.

A brief background

Ukraine is one of Europe's largest countries, both in terms of size and population. The census of December 2001 showed that the current number of inhabitants is just over 48 million. The area is known for its nutritious black soil, and it is very rich in natural resources, such as coal, metals and gas. Thus, farming, mining and heavy industry constitute the backbone of the economy.

The country's current borders are only half a century old.³ Before the foundation of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945, the area that constitutes the Ukraine today had been divided and ruled by its neighbouring countries for a long time. Ukraine, literally meaning 'borderland' or 'at the edge', has been the battleground for various empires and states for centuries. To borrow the words of the historian Orest Subtelny, "much of Ukraine's history is a function of its location" (Subtelny 1994:5).

When the first state in the Slavic area, the Kievan Rus', was weakened at the beginning of the second millennium, the principality of Halychyna, or Galicia, became the centre of Ukrainian intellectual and cultural life (see map; p.4). The city of Lviv was founded by prince Danylo of Halychyna in 1256, and named after his son Lev. The city was soon populated by artisans and merchants from Germany and Poland, Jews and Armenians, giving the city a multiethnic character.

In 1340 the Polish king Kazimierz III moved into Halychyna, and the western lands of Ukraine would now not be independent until 1991.⁴ After the first partition of Poland in 1772, Halychyna came under Austrian rule, but the local administration remained largely Polish.

The eastern Ukraine, governed by Cossacks, managed to stay independent until 1648, when it came under the rule of the Russian Empire. In 1945 the western and the eastern parts of Ukraine were joined in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and its current borders were established for the first time. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 Ukraine became an independent state.



The transition from socialism to market liberalism has been a rough road for the young Ukrainian state. Industry and agriculture are still struggling with the restructuring from a planned economy to a market economy, and state factories and collective farms are either very ineffective or have been shut down (see illustration 9; p.90). The Soviet economy was characterized by an artificial supply of goods, i.e. the production of goods was not based on the real demand for certain goods, but rather set by the party's five year plans. Quality and usability were often of secondary importance, since the result of a factory was measured by its fulfilment of the *quantity* of the plan. Foreign goods became available after 1991 and most of the domestic production was therefore outdistanced. The level of unemployment rose from an official level of zero unemployment during Soviet times to 2.3 million in 2002 (Ukrstat 2002).⁵

Hyperinflation and irregular wages during most of the 90s worsened the financial situation for a large segment of the Ukrainian population, and according to statistics, a majority now live under or just above the poverty line. The average monthly wage in the Lviv region was 485 hryvny (\$95) in April 2004 (*Postup* 2004). According to Ukrainian legislation, the minimum wage was 205 hryvny (\$40) and the subsistence level was 358 hryvny (\$69) in the same period. The minimum wage was therefore *lower* than the subsistence level.

Further, according to international rankings, corruption is a huge problem in post-Soviet Ukraine. Thus, in Transparency International's 'corruption perceptions' index Ukraine figures as country number 122 out of 146, in the company of countries like Sudan and Niger (TI 2004).

Overview of the chapters

In chapter one, I will outline a theoretical framework for the further analysis. First, I will discuss the relevance of analysing networking and personalisation of relations in a context of the Soviet past. Some legacies of the Soviet system will then be reviewed, especially the specific character of the private/public divide, in which the repressive state stood in sharp contrast to personal networks. One consequence of the private/public distinction was the development of the *blat* institution, which will be described and compared with gift-exchange and corruption.

In chapter two the fieldwork will be described; first I give an introduction to my informants, then I describe the fieldwork's locations, ethical problems and the method of data collection. Chapters three and four include an empirical introduction to the study of networking and personalisation of relations by describing the distinction between *svoi*, or 'ours', and *chuzhyj*, or 'stranger'. In chapter four the *svoi* category is more closely examined by dividing personal networks into different sub-categories.

In chapters five to eight I provide four different cases as illustrations of networking and the personalisation of relations. In chapter nine I will discuss some aspects of corruption in connection with the cases given, by giving a short overview of the public discourse on corruption. The aim is not to reach any definition of what corruption is, since that would require, if it is possible at all, a lot more time and pages. I rather point to some of the problems involved when categorising different acts as corrupt. Finally, the threads are gathered in the conclusion.

1 A Theoretical Framework

Post-socialism⁶ or culture of poverty?

Studying networking and the personalisation of relations in Ukraine poses some general theoretical concerns, i.e. what the actual framework of the analysis should be. As it is a society in transition, there are at least two relevant frameworks; we might view individuals' actions in a context of Soviet legacies, or as responses to current economic hardships. This can be concretised by Martha Lampland's (2002) discussion on economic transition and decollectivization in Hungary, where she draws a line between what she calls neo-classical and evolutionary economists.

In a neo-classical world, people act according to their immediate interest, situated within the present (and future) decision-making context. Thus the past is irrelevant, since one is free to act according to one's perceived interests. ... Evolutionary economist, in contrast, are far more sanguine about the nature of social relationships in economic activity, and look to past actions as a means of explaining behaviors to be anticipated in the present (*ibid*: 36).

Can practices such as networking and the personalisation of relations in the contemporary Ukraine be viewed as a continuity of 'socialist' practices, or should they be analysed in more general terms as responses to poverty? Further, as the centre of influence moved from a socialist Kremlin to a capitalist 'West', virtues such as collectivism and equality were replaced by notions of individualism and maximisation. Were the ideological upheavals so extensive that the concept of a 'post-socialist' Ukraine is no longer fruitful? The choice of theoretical framework will necessarily have important consequences for the analysis.

Analysing networking and the personalisation of relations in a context of responses to poverty would place my informants in a wider theoretical perspective, and thus promote cross-cultural comparison of economic behaviour. One model that looks at the link between poverty and cultural practices is Oscar Lewis' 'culture of poverty' (Lewis 1966).⁷

Placing poverty in the explanatory centre eases cross-cultural comparison, but at the same time it will miss the importance of analysing phenomena in their historical contexts. As Thomas Belmonte (1989) points out in his study on the poor in Naples,

Concepts like 'the culture of poverty' excuse us from the hard work of unravelling the profound economic and more subtle semiotic relationships that throw an invisible but nonetheless confining net over the lives and minds of rich and poor alike... Moreover, such a concept does not do justice to the fullness of their life-ways. [The poor of Naples] have a culture that is simultaneously against poverty, adapted to the stresses of poverty, and mangled by poverty. But they have a culture which is also fashioned out of a great Mediterranean tradition, in the crucible of a great Mediterranean city... these [Mediterranean cultural traits] are no more bonded to poverty than are the vines and the flowers that grow out from the ancient stones of their houses (*ibid*:xx;141).

I agree with Belmonte in his assertion that explaining life-ways by using variables such as poverty overlooks the historical context of the culture that is to be explained. Poverty most probably has important consequences for the ways in which people live their lives, but these consequences are moulded in a historical context. Using 'post-socialism' as an analytical framework will thus underline the continuity of individuals' life-worlds.

It is most likely that a person growing up under the Soviet rule internalised to some extent basic values and practices of that society; internalisations not totally erased by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Michael Tausig calls this kind of internalisation 'implicit social knowledge', that is

what moves people without their knowing quite why or quite how (...) Acquired through practice rather than through learning, like one's native tongue, implicit social knowledge can be thought of as one of the dominant faculties of what it takes to be a social being (Tausig 1987:366-7; 393, referred in Lampland 1991:462).

The influence of market liberalism and Western thought in general has therefore not entered a cultural void. Ulf Hannerz (1992) argues similarly that the influx of alien meanings and cultural forms "does not enter into a vacuum, or inscribe itself on a cultural *tabula rasa*, but enters into various kinds of interaction with already existing meanings and meaningful forms..." (*ibid*:262). There is continuity even in great upheavals, as there are both theses and antithesis in syntheses, and the present must therefore be understood in the context of a socialist past. The same conclusion is promoted by Lampland, as she criticises neo-classical economists for overlooking

cultural continuity. "It takes years of altered circumstances and new experiences to change the way people think and act" (Lampland 2002:32).

Whilst placing the analysis in a historical framework of Soviet socialism, I also need to make some qualifications. First, a too rigid use of the concept 'post-socialism' might be deterministic, indicating that people in the post-socialist area are doomed to a life in the chains of Soviet legacies, without the ability to incorporate new impulses and change their notions. This would be to revive the Bolsheviks' idea of Homo Sovieticus created for the communist future, only in a modern Homo Post-Sovieticus version which is created by its past.

Second, Steven Sampson (1991) argues that we should not reduce the complexity of social processes to a simple 'change vs. continuity' model.

Several distinct processes seem to be at work: the survival of cultural forms which the state has been unable to suppress, the state's resuscitation and manipulation of local cultural expressions, and the popular reinvention of traditions in new contexts (*ibid*:17).

Therefore, it can be helpful to view cultural systems as a "'web of significance' that is constantly woven and rewoven, continually integrating all sorts of historical changes and innovations" (Ries 1997:22). In such a view, threads of socialist values and ideas mingle with threads of the new capitalist order into a patchwork of meaning. As time goes by, however, the threads of a socialist past get fewer and fainter, until they disappears in the pattern altogether. "Sooner or later, as the generations brought up under socialist regimes disappear from the political scene, the category of postsocialism is likely to break apart and disappear" (Humphrey 2002a:13). To speak of legacies of Soviet socialism is relevant as long as it is relevant to the people living in the former Soviet Union.⁸

And thirdly, there is the methodological problem of spotting whether a social phenomenon really is a legacy of the socialist period or whether it has a more recent origin. Frances Pine (2002) puts it this way:

In the postsocialist world, particularly, any discussion of continuity and change is complicated by the fact that many social and economic processes, which appear to be quite new, demonstrate under closer scrutiny a marked similarity to older relations and practices, while others which appear to be continuities are taking place in contexts which are drastically different from any which previously existed (*ibid*:98).

Legacies of the Soviet system

The point here is not to give an exhaustive description of characteristics found in the Soviet system or the reasons for its collapse.⁹ I will rather point to certain consequences of the political and economical organisation on Soviet everyday life that seem to be of importance for post-Soviet society as well. More specifically, I will consider the private/public dimension of Soviet society and one consequence of that distinction, namely the emphasis on personal networks and the institution of *blat* in particular. I will broaden this theoretical overview with a more general discussion of gifts and corruption.

Private versus public

Before discussing the distinctive features of the private/public dichotomy in the Soviet Union, I need to look at some of the more general theories on the subject, because as Jeff Weintraub (1997:1) claims, it is one of the 'grand dichotomies' of Western thought. The private/public distinction has had a central place in theoretical analysis, not the least in anthropology. However, the many lines of demarcation drawn in different theoretical orientations seem to prove that it is not a clear or primordial one. As Weintraub puts it:

The public/private distinction, in short, is not unitary, but protean. It comprises, not a single paired opposition, but a complex family of them, neither mutually reducible nor wholly unrelated. These different usages do not simply point to different phenomena; often they rest on different underlying images of the social world, are driven by different concerns, generate different problematics, and raise very different issues. ... In short, any discussion of public and private should begin by recognizing, and trying to clarify, the multiple and ambiguous character of its subject matter (*ibid*:2-3).

Weintraub asserts that the irreducible heterogeneity of public/private distinctions is a consequence of two fundamentally separate imageries lying behind the different forms: 'private' contrasted with 'public' in terms of '*visibility*', i.e. what is hidden or withdrawn versus what is open or accessible; and 'private' contrasted with 'public' in terms of '*collectivity*', i.e. what is individual versus what is collective (*ibid*:4).

After reviewing the major orientations concerning the private/public distinction, Weintraub concludes that these dichotomous models necessarily overlook the

complexity of modern societies. "Thus, just as the 'public' realm (and politics) cannot be reduced to the state, the realm of social life outside the state (and its control) cannot simply be identified as 'private'" (*ibid*:15).

In spite of these drawbacks, this is a "misleading but necessary division" (Wolfe 1997:182), to use Alan Wolfe's words. Even though the distinction between public and private cannot be drawn in a sharp and consistent manner, we do still need to draw it. Thus both sides of the dichotomy need to be viewed as being more complex than just a coherent unit in a pair of contradictory spheres. Allan Silver (1997), for example, shows how personal relations inhibit a distinct domain of the private in modern society. This anti-instrumental realm of personal life is a preserve of intimacy, trust and generosity, and requires the existence of an impersonal world of bureaucracy, legal contract and market exchange (*ibid*:43). Therefore, contrary to popular views that regard friendship and trust as historical survivals in an impersonal modern world, Silver argues that

this domain of the private, however suffused by historical imagery, is less a historical survival than a distinctive creation of the impersonal order central to modern economies and politics. ...[The] ideal of friendship so quintessentially 'private', so contrary to the forms of association that dominate the 'public' domain, is distinctive to our times" (*ibid*:44; 47).

One theoretical approach that looks at the distinction between public and private from the actors' point of view is Erving Goffman's (1959) work on the presentation of self in everyday life. In Goffman's terminology, based on theatrical metaphors, 'public' is the 'front region' area where people perform their roles and control expression, while 'private' is the 'backstage' area where the same people can relax and be themselves (*ibid*:109-15). In respect to Weintraub's observation, the imagery lying behind Goffman's model is that of 'visibility', that is, the open and accessible 'front region' as opposed to the hidden and withdrawn 'backstage'. In the front region the individuals put on a performance to present themselves in a certain way, whereas backstage action is "related to the performance but inconsistent with the appearance fostered by the performance" (*ibid*:135). An important aspect of Goffman's model, mostly missing in other approaches to the public/private dichotomy, is therefore the boundedness and interconnectedness of the two regions. The actor moves between front region and backstage according to the situational context.

Thus, Goffman's theoretical perspective is more 'on the ground' and experience-near than, for instance, approaches viewing the public/private distinction in terms of state/non-state, or non-domestic/domestic. The model is not just structured from opposite spheres where one is merely residual, but rather inhabited by individuals moving between two equally important domains.

These two areas should not, however, be conceptualised as fixed places in space, although an ambassador's reception room does probably function *more often* as a front region than his or her kitchen does. Whether an area is front region or backstage thus depends on the occasion. "By invoking a backstage style, individuals can transform any region into a backstage" (*ibid*:130).

Taking an interactional point of view, Goffman is thereby able to show two important features of the public/private dichotomy: the boundary is *flexible* according to the situation and the two domains are of necessity interconnected.

Private and public in the Soviet Union

Marc Garcelon (1997) and Oleg Kharkhordin (1997) both claim that the public and private in Soviet-type societies were of a distinctive character. As Garcelon points out, Western concepts of private and public require careful interrogation and refinement before being applied to socialist and post-socialist societies (Garcelon 1997:304). First of all, there are no unambiguous equivalents of 'private' and 'public' in the Russian language or Soviet political thought (*ibid*). Further, the specific political and economical organisation characteristic to socialist societies gave 'private' and 'public' a different meaning than in market-liberal democracies. The totalitarian¹⁰ features of Soviet-type societies, i.e. the suppression of autonomous social and political life, the concentration of political power and the centralisation of the economy at the expense of independent economic producers contributed to a 'omni-visible' Party-state, which left no space for an autonomous civil society or political society to emerge (*ibid*:305-9).

Thus, by destroying every form of autonomous social activity, the Party claimed a monopoly over the 'public'. The contradictory result of this state monopoly was, as Garcelon asserts, a massive process of 'privatisation'; not in the Western sense of market

liberalism, but rather in the “form of pervasive networks of patron-client relationships and 'instrumental-personal' ties” (Garcelon 1997:315).

Garcelon therefore concludes that Western models of the public/private distinction are inappropriate for Soviet-type societies. Instead, he proposes a tripartite model that distinguishes between the realms of *officialdom*, the '*social*', and the *domestic* (*ibid*:317). Officialdom included the ruling elite and its immediate administrative apparatus. The '*social*' was the realm that developed in the space between the highest level of the Party pyramid and the informal networks of friends and family, such as “work, routine administration, and officially sanctioned and supervised associational life ... cutting across many of the lines that separate 'public' from 'private' in Western societies” (*ibid*). The domestic was the realm of family and friendship, which Garcelon claims “differed in significant respects from the sphere of 'personal life' in Western societies and served as a subterranean 'reservoir' of unorthodox and dissident practices and opinions” (*ibid*).

Garcelon's model contradicts the notion that there was a near-vacuum between the state and the private in socialist countries, as claimed by Catherine Verdery (1991:433) and Stefan Nowak (1979, referred in Wedel 1992:9-12). His conception of this 'in between' social domain is on a more interactional level, and it thus contains both formal and informal forms of action:

Interaction in the 'social' realm was organized not only according to ideological, meritocratic, and authoritarian-hierarchical principles, but also along lines of bargaining, reciprocal favors, mutual dependencies, networks of connections, dissimulation, circumvention of regulations and procedures, and the like (Garcelon 1997:317).

Such a view is supported by Janine Wedel (1992), from her study in socialist Poland. In her critique of Nowak's notion of the empty space between the state and the private, she claims that he

overlooks the fact that Polish society has long been organized by a complex system of informal relationships involving such forms as personalized patron-client contacts, lateral networks, and 'social circles' (...). Such relationships pervade the official state economy and bureaucracy and connect them to the community (*ibid*:12).

Kharkhordin goes even one step further than Garcelon, in that he views the social not only as an intermediate sphere of interaction between the private and officialdom, but rather as the *only* sphere, i.e. the only *visible* sphere (Kharkhordin 1997:359). He

claims that private life did not evolve into “a legitimate and protected sphere of privacy” (*ibid*), as has been the case in Western societies, but rather into hidden and closed circles of intimate personal networks, a process he calls 'the Great Retreat' (*ibid*:359).

The Bolshevik revolution did not explode the distinction between public and private and then reestablish it in a different form. Rather, it swept it away and replaced it, in the long run, with a division between the ‘social’, which consists of transparent ‘public’ and ‘personal’ lives, and an unseen, unrecognized private which does not exceed the most intimate. The dissimulation covering this intimate sphere became the most profound practice of Soviet society (*ibid*: 360).

This should be seen in a context of the socialist ideal of collectivism, where every Soviet citizen should transcend individual interests and concerns so as to reach a higher common unity. This could be achieved by making the communist project everyone’s project. According to Marxist-Leninist ideology, the complete communist citizen would not only conform to some external social laws, but rather internalise the very communist ideals and virtues. This was the rationale behind the education and construction of the 'New Soviet Man'. As the Soviet writer Georgi Smirnov (1973) pointed out in his tribute to this Soviet Man:

[With the] establishment of communist relations, the communist ideology becomes the working man’s own affair, his highest interest and ideal. Thus, the socialist personality emerges as a high-principled personality, placing the social, the public, interest first, and sharing the aims and principles of the communist ideology (*ibid*:175).

Smirnov maintains that, at the time of writing his book, the Soviet Union had already managed to change the human nature of its citizens, and that a “man of a new mould walks the earth ... [whose] whole inner life is illuminated by the high social ideals” (*ibid*:190).

If we return to Kharkhordin, he would strongly disagree with Smirnov in his assertion that the New Soviet Man 'walked the earth', at least in the form proclaimed by Smirnov.

In fact, Soviet society did succeed in creating a new individual, though not precisely the one intended. The goal was to construct a new society that would make saintly zeal its central organizing principle; the result ... was a society whose key constitutive practice was a pervasive and, in the long run, increasingly cynical dissimulation (Kharkhordin 1997:335).

This cynical dissimulation and exaltation of the private was enhanced by the terror and suppression used by the Communist Party to eliminate opposition to its politics and to make society more 'legible', to borrow James Scott's key metaphor (Scott 1998). Surveillance, deportations and brute force were employed to gag internal enemies of the state. Thus, on the political and ideological level, the United States and 'capitalism' constituted the terrible 'other' and the great enemy. For citizens, however, the enemy was the 'state' and the 'neighbour', the latter in the role of a potential informer (Pine 2002:107; Neumann 1999). Particularly during the Stalin period neighbours were actively used by the KGB as spies and informers, which created an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust, and produced a social atomisation (Verdery 1996:24, Salmi 2003:149). The victims of the Stalin terror were sometimes arbitrary, as anonymous denunciations were means that could be used in interpersonal conflicts (Sampson 1991:19). Jan T. Gross calls this a 'privatisation' of the instruments of coercion, made available to everyone through the mechanism of denunciation (Gross 1988:120, referred in Verdery 1991:426). The dissident writer Vasilij Grossman claimed, in the words of John Garrard (1994),

that the Soviet experiment only worked for so long because of its great success in getting the population to be suspicious, to be fearful, and thus to spy on one another. Betrayal was at the heart of a state that could not exist without it. ... The Soviet deification of betrayal did enormous damage to the population, snapping the bonds of trust even between husband and wife, and parent and child. Indeed, betrayal was taught to Soviet children. ... The end result was an atomization of society: the fabric of trust between the state and its citizens, and among and between citizens, was shredded (*ibid*:281; 280).

The atomisation was not as absolute as Grossman would have it, since the development of personal networks, described by both Garcelon and Kharkhordin, is lacking from his account. There was thus an elevation of the 'inside' and a rejection of the 'outside'; private space, in contrast to public space; one's personal network, in contrast to non-acquaintances.¹¹ "To varying degrees, personal relations in socialist societies were based on strong demarcations between trusted 'insiders' and distrusted 'outsiders'" (Dudwick & De Soto 2000:4).¹²

Personal networks and blat

The 'inside', in the form of personal networks, was thus elevated as a reaction to political repression. This elevation was also a consequence of the Soviet economic system, where one's personal network was used to obtain scarce goods. Catherine Verdery (1991, 1996) has described the economic system of socialist countries as being characterised by: highly centralised redistribution, priority for heavy industry at the expense of consumer industry and relative and absolute scarcity of resources as a result of hoarding and bargaining at all levels of the economy (Verdery 1991:420-2). She draws on the Hungarian economist Janos Kornai, who noted that the outcome of socialist economic organisation was an 'economy of shortage', i.e. it was *supply* which was scarce in socialist countries, rather than *demand* as in capitalist countries (Verdery 1993:174). The consequence is that whereas 'salesmanship' is a prized quality in capitalist systems, 'acquisitionmanship', or being able to *obtain* scarce goods, was a necessary quality in socialist societies.¹³

One device that individuals could use to acquire scarce goods was to personalise relationships with people who had access to these goods. Having a personal relationship with a clerk in a state store would enable people to acquire products without having to queue for hours. Alena Ledeneva (1998) has made a thorough analysis of this phenomenon in its Soviet Russian variant, known as *blat*.¹⁴

Blat, in short, is the use of personal networks and informal contacts to obtain scarce public goods and resources, i.e. finding a way around structural constraints and formal procedures of allocation in the Soviet 'economy of shortage'. However, it is difficult to provide an accurate definition of *blat*, for as Ledeneva points out,

the term means different things in different contexts, irreducible to some common ground... The variety in regularity of favours, kind of relationship between the parties, type of need, character of reciprocity, participation of an intermediary makes *blat* situations almost irreducible to any clear-cut classification (ibid:33-4).

Ledeneva rather points out some 'family resemblances' in *blat* situations, first and foremost that *blat* is "a distinctive form of non-monetary exchange, a kind of barter based on personal relationship" (ibid:34). Further, *blat* exchange most frequently involved desired commodities of consumption, solving all kinds of everyday problems,

arranging jobs and the outcome of decisions, and thereby reducing uncertainty in everyday life. Therefore, having friends and family members in strategic places, and thereby having access to resources at their workplace, was of the utmost importance. Getting goods and services through the official distribution system was possible, but it was more troublesome, more time-consuming, more expensive, and resulted in goods of lower quality (Borén 2003:26). Since *blat* exchange was a reaction to scarcity of goods, it flourished during the stagnation years of the Breznev period, especially in the 1970s.

Ledeneva claims this phenomenon became such a pervasive feature of public life in the Soviet Union that she refers to it as an 'economy of favors', which enabled a flawed distribution system to function: "Quite literally, the system could not have functioned without it: *blat* was the prime way of getting things done in a non-market society in which money counted for rather little" (Ledeneva 1998:103). While making the system more effective, *blat* subverted it at the same time by contradicting the official ideology of equality for all, because as *blat* involved people *within* personal networks, it necessarily excluded others who did not have the right connections.

Blat relations therefore drained resources from the official centralized distribution system into an informal system of distribution based on personal networks. This interconnection of the private and the public was a crucial feature of *blat*. As Ledeneva puts it:

The embeddedness of *blat* in both formal institutions and informal relations constitutes its essential nature. *Blat* is grounded not only in the use of one's position or working place (which is implied in corruption) but also in personal, often altruistic, incentives" (ibid:46).

Blat and gifts

One side of *blat*, then, comprises the shortcomings and scarcity in everyday life. The other is reciprocal relationships between friends, based on mutual sympathy and trust. Since *blat* is anchored in personal relations, Ledeneva claims it is subject-subject relation, binding the actors transferring favours, and not an object-object relation, i.e. it is not a relationship between the objects transferred (ibid:39). This is analogous to C. A. Gregory's (1982) distinction between gift exchange and commodity exchange, where gift exchange establishes a relation between the transactors (subject-subject relation), and

commodity exchange establishes a relation between the objects transacted (*ibid*:42).

While “commodities are *alienable* objects transacted by aliens; gifts are *inalienable* objects transacted by non-aliens” (*ibid*:43).¹⁵

Ledeneva, however, analyses *blat* as an “intermediary form of exchange to be associated neither with 'the gift' nor with 'commodity exchange'” (Ledeneva 1998:141), since it is a *reciprocal* exchange of *alienable* goods within already established social relationships, masked by a delayed return and disguised by altruistic motives of friendly help (*ibid*:141; 42). What is non-alienable in *blat*, however, is the very favour itself, which is 'marked by the personal stamp of the donor' (*ibid*:141).

Ledeneva thus separates *blat*-exchange from gift-exchange, both being subject-subject relations, because *blat* involves alienable objects, whereas gifts are, according to Gregory, inalienable. This distinction might not, however, be very accurate. Alfred Gell (1992) disagrees with Gregory's notion that gifts are inalienable objects:

Objects *are* alienated in gift exchanges. In making a presentation, the donor loses access to the exchange-object, which passes to another, and with it the power to donate that object to a different recipient, whereas the recipient gains both of these. ... What is not 'alienated' in gift-giving is not the gift-object itself, but that which *cannot* be alienated, namely, the social identity of the donor, which still attaches to the object after it has been given away (*ibid*:145).¹⁶

This quote fits convincingly well with Ledeneva's claim that *blat* favours include alienable objects and that it is the *identity* of the donor which is non-alienable. Gregory's model is thus not adequate for separating *blat* from gifts or commodities.

Further, Ledeneva claims that the degree of compulsion is important in distinguishing *blat* from gifts:

What differentiates [gifts and *blat*] is the compulsion and 'contrived asymmetry' of the gift, as opposed to the relative freedom and balance of *blat*. The compulsion of the gift, as Marilyn Strathern emphasises, lies in forcing others to enter into debt. It is here that the 'contrived asymmetry' lies: one has to accept a gift and thus a debt. ... [As *blat*] happens upon request, [it] is protected from imposed generosities, even though some implications of 'debt' or 'honour' may occur (Ledeneva 1998:142).

This criterion is, as I see it, more relevant in separating *blat*-exchange and gift-exchange. *Blat* is essentially reciprocity of *favours* and *access* to scarce objects, and therefore necessarily involves a *prior agreement* on the specific transfer. There is no 'imposed generosity' or forced relationship of debt. A central aspect of gift-giving, however, is an

element of *surprise* and unexpectedness. Further, as Marcel Mauss (1954) claims in his important and much-quoted work on gift-giving, a receiver is obliged to receive a gift and later to give a return-gift. A gift can therefore be used intentionally to force someone into a reciprocal relationship. Pierre Bourdieu (1996) thus maintains that “...the first presentation of a gift [is] an attack on the receiver’s freedom ... it is a way of holding on to others, by creating debtors” (*ibid*:80).¹⁷ Peter M. Blau (1968) has even made a model of social exchange, based on the instrumentality of gift-giving. As he explains his model:

The basic assumptions of the theory of social exchange are that men enter into new social associations because they expect doing so to be rewarding... People often go out of their way to do favors not only for friends but also for mere acquaintances and even for strangers, and they thereby create social obligations. The individual who fails to discharge his obligations and reciprocate in some form for benefits received robs others of incentives to continue to befriend him. Besides, such an individual is likely to be accused of ingratitude (*ibid*:452).

This obligation to reciprocate is widely supported by cross-cultural empirical evidence, and Alvin W. Gouldner (1960) asserts that reciprocity is a universal moral norm: “A norm of reciprocity is, I suspect, no less universal and important an element of culture than the incest taboo, although, similarly, its concrete formulations may vary with time and place” (*ibid*:171). Such a view is supported by the moral philosopher Lawrence C. Becker (1986) as well, who concludes that reciprocity is a fundamental moral virtue. Becker further points out that reciprocity is the *recipient’s* virtue, and the motives of the giver, whether altruistic, instrumental or somewhere in between, do not influence the recipient’s obligation to return the gift (*ibid*:93).

These different features of *blat* and gift will be illuminated in *Cases II* and *III*, and in the analysis.

Blat in post-Soviet states

As Ledeneva asserts, *blat* was a specific feature of the Soviet system. What then happened to this institution after the demise of the socialist Soviet in 1991? Did *blat* relations lose their central position in society and vanish along with the command economy? The reforms in post-Soviet transition undermined at least two crucial conditions for the functioning of *blat*; the 'economy of shortage' was replaced by functioning markets for goods and capital, and state property became privatised to a

large extent (Ledeneva 1998:176). While during Soviet times there was a scarcity of goods, the 'object' of scarcity after 1991 is money (Fürst 2004:185). As one of my informants put it: "Before we had money, but there was nothing to buy. Now you can buy anything you want, but we don't have any money to buy it with". The use of *blat* connections has therefore become re-orientated, as people use connections to arrange work and obtain money, and not goods (Ledeneva 1998:178, Borén 2003:30).

Further, as noted above, *blat* connects the public and private, and therefore necessarily had to change as 'public' and 'private' became imbued with new meanings as state property was privatised. Individuals involved in *blat* during the Soviet 'economy of scarcity' did not have any personal loss in the exchange; since the resources exchanged were public property, the state bore the costs. When *blat* is mixed with private property, however, the provider has to give up his own resources. Thomas Borén (2003:29) thus claims that the new owners of private firms and factories have an interest in preventing their employees from using company property for personal gain. Ledeneva also notes this: "In private business, attitudes towards property and helping out are becoming totally different from how they were before. Material calculations, rather than the fact of acquaintance, count for most" (Ledeneva 1998:180). Embezzling of resources from a private firm would more likely be viewed as theft, while embezzling from a Soviet state enterprise was seen as 'taking the part that is mine' (Ledeneva 1998:36). As Elżbieta Firlit and Jerzy Clopeski (1992) note, an action can be defined as theft when it involves taking an object that is 'not mine', but rather belongs to an 'identifiable other' (*ibid*:98). They claim that socialist states did not constitute an identifiable other, and taking public property was therefore not viewed as theft. "The idea of public property blurs the distinction between mine and not mine (someone else's), a distinction ever-present in the moral consciousness, even when we cannot say whose property something is: it is enough to know that it is not ours" (*ibid*:99). When state property was privatised, taking something that is 'not mine' would thus mean taking something from an 'identifiable other'. Siphoning off goods for distribution within personal networks is probably viewed as being more immoral when the goods concerned are private property rather than state property.

Even though some of the fundamental conditions for *blat* no longer exists, different studies show that it is still 'alive and kicking' in post-Soviet societies (Fürst 2004; Lonkila 1997; Borén 2003). Consistent with the above discussion on the legacy problem, "[b]lat patterns have been strongly internalised by the culture of older Soviet generations, but even the Newest Russians have a weak spot for this kind of 'Sovietness'" (Ledeneva 1998:212). M. Lonkila (1997), in a comparative study of school teachers in St. Petersburg and Helsinki, found that *blat* still continue to be important in the life of post-Soviet citizens.

The results support the view proposed by previous research according to which informal exchange and patterns of behavior inherited from the socialist era still continue to influence the transition society. The continuing lack of trust in official institutions and social services was compensated for by our Russian respondents with the use of their personal relations (Lonkila 1997:1).

Thomas Borén (2003) likewise argues for the continued relevance of *blat* in Russia. "Although the term *blat* is becoming increasingly obsolete, the phenomenon as such still plays an important part in people's everyday economy..." (*ibid*:21). He claims that *blat*, and the transformation of social capital into other forms of capital, will continue 'as long as the experienced cost of doing so is perceived as being lower than the expected gain' (Borén 1993:33).

The use of *blat* in post-Soviet society thus continues, although be it in a mutated form. As the structural conditions for *blat* have changed, so has the phenomenon itself. Klas Sedlieniks (2003) puts it this way:

What changed were the spheres of life where the scarce exchange objects were located. If in the Soviet period it was private life, with the disappearance of a planned economy and the development of possibilities for private enterprise, the exchange moved to business life. Now the things that were needed, but not available to everybody, were for instance, bank loans, licences, permits..." (*ibid*:40).

Sedlenieks (2003) and Agnese C. Barstad (2004), both studying economic activities in Latvia, point out that the practices that were earlier seen as *blat* in popular discourse have now "moved into the realm of corruption" (Sedlenieks 2003:40). Both Sedlenieks and Barstad claim that this conceptual change is due to the introduction of money in what was a non-monetary exchange of favours. *Blat* was thus not meant to be an instrument for accumulation of wealth, but rather for satisfying elementary personal

needs. Further, Sedlenieks maintains that the ambiguity of moral evaluation that was characteristic of *blat* is also found in evaluation of corruption: “Thus, current corrupt practices in contemporary Latvia can be both condemned and tolerated...” (*ibid*:42).

Caroline Humphrey (2002b), in a study from Russia, does not agree with Sedlenieks and Barstad,

It is a legitimate question to ask whether the distinction between bribery and networks of reciprocity has been eroded by the dramatic commercialization of the 1990s. Recent evidence suggests that the cultural systems of networks remain in place, and that bribery continues to be excluded from them (*ibid*:138).

Blat, bribery and corruption

Being a subject-subject relation, Ledeneva maintains that *blat* is distinct from other forms of informal exchanges, such as bribery.

Embedded in ‘human’ relationships (friendship, kin relations, acquaintance), *blat* differed from more negative forms of exchange and power. ... In *blat*, there is some personal basis for expecting a proposal to be listened to sympathetically... (a subject-subject relation). In bribery it is only the offer of a bribe which links the two persons involved (an object-object relation). ... In contrast to bribery, *blat* is a matter of belonging to a circle. *Blat* favours are normally provided to *svoim* (people of the circle, one of us) (Ledeneva:39-40).

Further, while bribery involves an immediate payment or compensation for a favourable action or decision that would otherwise not have taken place, *blat* does not imply any straightforward offer nor immediate reciprocation, but rather cooperation and mutual help with a long-term perspective (*ibid*).

Corruption is often used to cover many different phenomena, including bribery and favouritism, which all have the common feature of transcending the public/private boundary (Ruud 1998:3; Andvig and Fjeldstad 2001:11). A transcendence such as this is very much a feature of *blat*. By creating distribution systems based on personal networks, *blat* thus circumvents the official distribution system, and thereby gives advantage to those who have the right connections. On an ethical level, such favouritism breaks with democratic virtues of equality and fairness. As argued by William Miller, Åse Grødeland and Tatyana Koschekina (2001):

All citizens in a democratic state have a right to fair and equal treatment by officials – reflecting their equality of status as citizens. But it is more difficult on grounds of democratic equality to justify ‘favourable’ treatment.

Difficult, but not impossible. Specially favourable treatment for those with special needs (...) can be justified on grounds of equality. But specially favourable treatment for those with special wants, special greed or special avarice cannot (*ibid*:2001:81).

Further, this also breaks with elementary principles of professionalism in a Weberian-bureaucratic sense, where the official should clearly separate his or her professional role from personal motives (Weber 2000:92). Don K. Rowney (1989) thus points out:

Bureaucrats' professional tasks are so defined that they will integrate readily and predictably with the tasks of many other individuals. Similarly, they are so defined as to be separable from the person who holds a given office. Official tasks and official authority are, as Max Weber pointed out, attached to the office, not to the individual... It is worth noting, however, that the distinction between person and authority in bureaucracy is often blurred" (*ibid*:11).

This lack of clarity between person and authority in bureaucracy is where professionalism moves over into corruption. James C. Scott thus defines corruption in socialist societies as "behaviour which deviates from the *formal* duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) wealth or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence" (Scott 1972:4; referred in Ledeneva 1998:43)¹⁸. To draw a line between *blat* and corruption from a formalistic perspective can thus require strenuous efforts, and might prove altogether unfruitful.

Other authors argue that such formalistic objections are based on Western conceptions of democracy and bureaucracy, and not necessarily universally applicable. Akhil Gupta (1995), Arild Engelsen Ruud (1998), and Tone Kristin Sissener (2001) all maintain that to categorise an act as corrupt or not is only possible when we analyse what context-situated people themselves regard as legitimate and illegitimate. To use a universal and formalistic definition of corruption prevents us of taking the 'native's point of view' into account. Sissener (2001) puts it this way,

A narrow definition of corruption makes it difficult to explain how behaviour, that transcends Weberian borders of what is deemed acceptable for holders of public office, are seen as legitimate and even laudable to those involved (*ibid*:11).

Mayfair M. Yang describes how gift-giving, or *guanxi*, in China is valued as legitimate in certain contexts, for instance when trying to obtain and change job

assignments and obtain better education. She thus argues that “the art of *guanxi* cannot be reduced to a modern western notion of corruption because the personalistic qualities of obligation, indebtedness, and reciprocity are just as important as transactions in material benefit” (Yang 1994:108; referred in Sissener 2001:11). Likewise, Gouldner (1960) describes how the *compadre* system in the Philippines undermines bureaucratic impersonality, but since it is founded on the norm of reciprocity, it is “relatively legitimate, hence overt and powerful” (*ibid*:171).

Ruud (1998) analyses corruption as strategies people use when trying to cope with bureaucracy and thereby humanize it. He points out that bureaucrats are not culturally isolated from the people with whom they have to deal: “They are as everybody else social beings, who live and participate in a social environment, in networks on which they depend – in part for their livelihood, but more crucial for their social well-being” (*ibid*.:2). Bureaucrats certainly belong to circles of family and friends, which sometimes force them to choose between their role as a professional and that of a family member or friend. It is when these two roles cross that things get blurred. However, it is difficult to set any objective criteria for this crossing of roles and to say when this would become an act of corruption. Ledeneva thus argues that the *blat* institution was *not* valued as corruption, since it was embedded in personal networks and depicted in terms of mutual help between friends.

An anthropological approach to the study of corruption thus looks at the phenomenon from the 'native's point of view', and is able to see how the actors themselves evaluate different acts. Empirical evidence, as the *guanxi*- and *compadre*-institutions, shows that the distinction Ledeneva makes between subject-subject relations and object-object relations is often important in 'native' valuation as well.

Misrecognition in blat, gifts and corruption

People's own conceptions of *blat* and corruption are not, however, straightforward to measure. Ledeneva describes how her informants avoid calling their own actions *blat*, referring to them rather as mutual help:

...informal deals were called '*blat*' when practiced by others but described in terms of friendship or mutual help in the case of personal involvement. The assumption that '*blat* is everywhere' was universally accepted by respondents, but most of them avoided accepting their own involvement in *blat* or refrained from naming it as such (Ledeneva 1998:6).

Ledeneva, borrowing a term from Bourdieu, calls this a game of 'misrecognition'. She claims that the paradoxical nature of *blat* is essential in understanding its legitimacy. Since *blat*-exchange was veiled in a rhetoric of friendship and mutual help when practiced by egos, it was valued as legitimate and moral, while it was seen as something illegitimate and amoral in public discourse (*ibid*:68). To put it another way, the subject-subject relation between the transactors covers over the object-object relations between the scarce goods or favours exchanged over time.

Bourdieu (1996) uses the concept of 'misrecognition' in his analysis of gifts. He claims that the essential feature of a gift-exchange is the *time lag* between the presentation of a gift and the counter-gift, because this interval veils the objective obligation to reciprocate a received gift. Delayed reciprocity thus gives the donor an experience of giving altruistically and free of interest, and the receiver an experience of returning a gift without being forced to do so:

gift exchange is one of the social games that cannot be played unless the players refuse to acknowledge the objective truth of the game, the very truth that objective analysis brings to light, and unless they are predisposed to contribute ... to the production of collective misrecognition (Bourdieu 1990:105; referred in Ledeneva 1998:59).

A similar phenomenon can also be seen in acts that are valued as corruption.

Caroline Humphrey (2002b) writes:

Bribery remains a morally condemned idea in Russian popular culture... *Vzятка* (the bribe) as a representational category is applied unequivocally only to the public state sphere, and it is used with much less certainty with regard to unorthodox payments in private commercial life, which tend to be described in other ways, as 'additional fees', 'tariffs', 'subsidies', 'gratuities', 'discounts', 'premiums', and the like. ... The fact is that people rarely use the term *vzятка* about their own activities (*ibid*:127; 133).

Similarly, Janine Wedel (1986) describes how *spekulacja* (private sale of public goods) and corruption were social evils in socialist Poland. “Even so, almost everyone in everyday life is involved in it on a small scale and considers his activity normal and acceptable” (*ibid*:51).

2 The Field Site

The main locations of the study were a city bazaar and a local NGO combating trafficking in women. In addition I conducted informal interviews and had conversations with informants and friends in my own network.

I had more or less frequent contact with about 45 informants, mostly employed in the private sector. One informant was employed in the public sector and eight were unemployed. Among the unemployed, one had no income, and was supported by the spouse, four were engaged in some sort of unofficial activity that provided them with income, and three were engaged in subsistence agriculture. Three of the unemployed had spent longish periods abroad working unofficially. One of the employed informants was also a pensioner, and received a pension as well as a wage.

Most of my informants lived in the city. Ten informants, however, lived in rural areas, and our encounters were more sporadic. Ten informants lived in households consisting of three generations, while the majority lived in households with one or two generations.

The majority of my informants would, according to official measures, belong to the Ukrainian middle class. Thus, in 2001 President Kuchma defined the middle class as consisting of persons earning between \$62 and \$120 a month (Sangina 2002). Subjectively, some of them claimed to be poor, and most of them did have official wages under the subsistence level. I would, however, prefer to call this relative poverty.¹⁹ All of my informants lived in nice apartments or houses, had enough money to pay for food and other expenses, and had luxury items like mobile phones, DVD-players, computers etc. Some of my informants were even rather well off, and spent quite a lot of money on entertainment and holidays. The price level for food and domestically produced goods is very low compared to a Western European standard, but imported goods like computers and mobile phones are expensive, especially relative to the Ukrainian average wage.²⁰

Fieldworker, husband and friend

My fieldwork deviated from what may be a common conception of the field situation. The fieldworker usually leaves family and friends behind to get as close as possible to the subjects of the study. This fieldwork was the opposite. I went to the Ukraine to live with my Ukrainian wife, a situation that brought advantages and problems to my role as a fieldworker and husband. The obvious advantages were the access to information and the high degree of confidence in me from informants in my wife's network. As Wedel notes from her study in Poland: "An outsider has difficulty penetrating a Pole's public face to understand the layers of a more private world. ... It is impossible to be viewed as a foreigner and to be considered *swoj człowiek* [one of us] at the same time" (Wedel 1986:24; 26). My wife was thus a bridge into Ukrainian everyday life, and a cultural 'interpreter' of phenomena I did not immediately grasp. We often discussed situations and actions I found peculiar, and she would explain them to me while I typed it down and asked supplementary questions.

The problem of using my wife as an informant is of course connected to ethical aspects and the lack of distance from the object of the study (see under). Another disadvantage was the fact that the presence of my wife limited my choice of informants to some degree. She clearly expressed which persons I should and should not contact. This prevented me from seeking out certain informants, especially those from the 'lower classes'. I had the idea of contacting people with 'low status' jobs, to map their networks and to find out to what degree they could use these networks to achieve some goal. This idea was not well received, and I gave up on empirical evidence for the benefit of matrimonial peace.

I also have an extensive family in Western Ukraine, since my grandparents were born there. Family members were an invaluable source of in-depth information, and they were, along with my wife, made informants long before I commenced this fieldwork. The fact that my informants viewed me as an ethnic Ukrainian, and the fact that I speak more or less fluently Ukrainian, automatically placed me somewhat 'within'. This role as a 'halfie'²¹ probably eased the creation of confident relationships with informants. Again using family and close friends as informants enhances the risk of

ethical conflicts between the role of fieldworker and that of a friend and family member, and compels a serious degree of anonymization and discretion.

My role as a 'halfie' also meant that I was seen as a Norwegian. This caused some problems when talking to people who were not in my immediate circle of friends. Such people were often more interested in getting information about Norway than talking about themselves. Many of the people I met clearly expressed their desire to go to Norway to work, and wanted me to help them in one way or another. This limited my initiative to contact people I did not know. It shows, however, how many Ukrainians are trying to improve their lives, and how they seek contacts and new network nodes which can help them do so.

All in all I feel the unusual field situation gave me more advantages than disadvantages. The data from informants in my own and my wife's networks are much more extensive and sincere than the data from informants I contacted on my own. This is probably connected to the fact that informants in my own network viewed me more as a friend, while informants I contacted during the fieldwork probably viewed me more as a fieldworker.

Ethical concerns and a fictive network of proto-informants

Although all of my informants were aware of the purpose of the field study, I do have a moral obligation not to abuse their trust and friendship. Much of the information was shared with me as a friend, and not as a fieldworker. On some occasions friends even asked me specifically not to use the information they gave me. Being citizens of a post-Soviet country, in which only two decades previously information about yourself and your activities was your worst enemy, they often expressed concerns that giving me information could eventually do them harm. The level of description is therefore a fine balance between consideration of the informants' privacy and the desire for empirical evidence. Igor Bersegian (2000) poses some relevant questions when discussing the problems of moral choice for native, and likewise non-native, social scientists:

How does one move from the private participation to public observation and detachment? How can one put in writing what one knows privately, making it available for academic – but not only academic – communities without endangering people whom one has interviewed? (*ibid*:127).

This is especially pressing when the phenomena of study is hidden from public life and sometimes illegal.

The prime concern when writing this paper is to shield my informants. This is a concern I need to take very seriously, and I have therefore decided to make up prototypes that are based on real information, but that cannot be traced back to any real person. This will to some degree enable me to describe quite compromising events, without endangering my informants, since such prototypes “are not living or real persons or situations, but constructions put together from elements of a multitude of persons and situations” (Widerberg 2001:124). Thus, all data that are based on first or second hand observations will be treated as such, only in the guise of artificial characters. Janine Wedel (1986) did the same in her study of socialist Poland: “To protect Polish sources, I have created fictional characters. They are true to my observations in general... any resemblance to actual people is purely coincidental” (*ibid*:xi). Further, these proto-informants will be placed in a fictive personal network.

Of course, the danger of oversimplifying human life by constructing prototypes and artificial networks is great. Gathering different actions and statements made by quite different persons into prototypes will necessarily distort the connection between a person’s representations and his or her actions and utterances. Further, the high degree of anonymization necessarily makes a very detailed ethnographic account impossible. The cases given can thus be regarded rather as 'thin descriptions', a conscious choice I have made to protect my informants.

However, the construction of proto-informants can be justified from a methodological perspective. In an analysis of Pierre Bourdieu’s work on the problems of objectification in sociological research, Susanna M. Solli (1998) writes: “According to Bourdieu, any scientific object will in some sense or another imply a construction – consciously or unconsciously. ... It is therefore important that the scientific process of construction is made explicit and conscious” (*ibid*:238). Likewise, any description of a personal network must necessarily be a construction, no matter how hard we try to give an accurate representation of reality. J. Clyde Mitchell (1974) thus claims that

...before the diagram gets to the paper the fieldworker must have decided to represent some abstract property of the social relationships by lines linking points representing persons ... What is involved here is the way in which the full complexity of human relationships may be so abstracted and simplified as to be capable of being represented as a

network diagram. Which aspect of the relationship the observer chooses to represent in his diagram (...) will obviously turn upon the purpose the observer has in mind (*ibid*:292).

At the bazaar

At the beginning of the fieldwork I spent a couple of days a week at a city bazaar, hanging out with a group of sellers working there. The majority of goods sold at the bazaar consisted of clothes and footwear, but you can also find a wide range of other products, such as toys, fruit and vegetables, electrical appliances, pets and so on. The bazaar was divided into two main sections; an outdoor and an indoor one. The outdoor section consisted of a large amount of metal containers placed side by side, connected through an intricate system of pathways. Every morning the sellers would open the front of the container, placing their goods in the opening, or hanging them on the container doors. The stalls were sparsely decorated, with worn-out linoleum covering the floor and sometimes a plastic chair or a curtain for privacy when trying on clothes. There was no heating, so during the winter it was freezing cold for both sellers and customers alike.

The indoor sections contained fancier shops with show windows, tiles on the floor, changing rooms and sometimes even a sofa. The shops had heating, a radio playing Ukrainian or Russian pop music, and had overall a more relaxed atmosphere than the outdoor stalls did. Despite the uncomfortable environment around the outdoor stalls, many people preferred to buy goods there, because they were regarded as being less expensive than the indoor shops.

My main informant at the bazaar was Roman, a middle-aged man who makes a living by selling compact discs and DVD films, many of them being pirate copies. At the beginning of the fieldwork he rented a 3x4 meter large metal container in the outdoor section, where the discs were placed for display on three tables along the inside walls.

Roman's stall appeared to be a natural meeting place for a loose network of sellers, most of them working on the neighbouring stalls. This was in January with temperatures below zero, so the sellers gathered round Roman's stall drinking hot tea and telling anecdotes. I was often made the entertainer, and had to tell about Norwegian average

wages, the standard of living and prices of cars, cigarettes and booze, to the great amusement of the small audience.

Mingling with the sellers gave me a good insight into the life at the bazaar and of the informal economy in general. A lot of the time there were no costumers, so I could have undisturbed conversations and ask questions. The level of openness among the sellers varied, however, especially regarding economic topics.

After two months of fieldwork, Roman decided to rent a shop in the indoor section. This was to be an event that changed the whole field situation at the bazaar. Even though the new shop was situated only 200 meters from the old stall, Roman and I were isolated from our usual network of sellers and from the milieu at the bazaar in general. The sellers at the indoor bazaar kept mostly to themselves in their shops, and did not have any natural meeting place. And while customers just passed by the outdoor stall, asking for prices and looking through the discs now and then, they now came into the shop. This meant that the shop was often crowded with people and I had less time to speak with Roman. My presence at the bazaar therefore became less frequent.

At the women's centre

Early in the fieldwork I contacted a local NGO that works with preventing and fighting trafficking in women. The idea was to look at a possible connection between trafficking and the informal economy: whether or not victims of trafficking are in a more precarious economic situation than other women, what possibilities they have to participate in the informal economy and to what extent they have a network of family and friends that can be mobilized, for example when looking for work.

I worked for one or two days a week at the centre, usually doing background research and translating project applications. I did not participate in the daily practical work, interact with the centre's clients nor speak to any victims of trafficking. My lack of experience in prevention and rehabilitation work was the reason for this. The consequence was that I did not get the data that I had hoped for, so after a while I spent less time at the centre. Instead this part of the fieldwork provided background

information on the Ukrainian legal and social system, since the workers at the centre were experienced lawyers and social workers.

Informal conversations with informants

The most fruitful and rewarding form of data collection appeared to be informal conversations with informants from my own and my wife's network. These conversations gave me much information on general household economy, economic rationality, official and unofficial wages, mobilization of networks, bribing, economic morality, and so on. These informants were much more open about their everyday activities than any of the informants at the bazaar or at the women's centre had been. As pointed out earlier, this was a consequence of the social setting, and whether the role of a friend or the role of fieldworker dominated the interaction. Or to use Goffman's (1959) terminology; whether it was a 'backstage' or a 'front section' setting. It was more natural to discuss aspects of a mundane and everyday character with close friends than with persons with whom I had a more professional relationship as a fieldworker. While the methodological approach was participant observation aimed at qualitative data collection, the different settings required different *kinds* of participation, and therefore had a clear influence on the type of data collected. In the informal conversations I was more of a listener to discussions between my informants, while I took a more active role asking questions at the bazaar and the women's centre. The data collected in the informal setting therefore seemed more sincere and less 'provoked'.

Observation of the informants' activities

Most observations of everyday economic activities were made by following informants in their daily doings. Such observations could be of situations of networking and what I would describe as the personalisation of relations where gifts and money were given to persons with whom the informants had some kind of business, the direct bribing of officials, fixing of meters for gas and electricity to reduce bills, (mis)use of resources from one's workplace for private gain, to name but a few.

Some observations were more personal than others. I was, for instance, invited to two weddings during the fieldwork, one in the countryside and one in the city. Such events gave me an opportunity to observe social interactions first hand, especially acts of ritualised gift-giving and social drinking, both important aspects in the analysis.

Diary, notepad and ethical infringement

Every evening I wrote down all impressions and events gathered during the day in a diary. In this diary I also kept a record of different expenses so as to get a picture of the cost of living.

I did not use a tape recorder during the informal conversations, although I had bought one before starting the fieldwork. I sometimes wrote down notes in a notepad during conversations, but only with informants in my closest circle of friends and family. This was a measure of precaution, since I found people very careful about not revealing too much information about themselves. Tape recorders, notepads, formal interviews and questionnaires can arouse suspicion among people who have lived most of their lives in an authoritarian state with an active security police. As Sissener (2001) points out,

...traditional social science methods like questionnaires and quantitative studies run the risk of being identified with police interrogations and to produce embarrassed silence, self-victimisation, condemnation of others, and a very biased result (*ibid*:6).

Thomas Belmonte (1989) describes in a similar manner how people in Naples reacted negatively to questionnaires and questions about their personal economy, as they suspected he was a spy from the taxation authorities. "People were understandably reluctant to reveal all the facts about how they made a living" (*ibid*:108).

One event made me seriously consider the ethical aspects of doing a field study. Walking around the city with my camera, I took pictures that could illustrate some of the phenomena described in this thesis. Outside one of the bazaars six women were selling clothes which they had hung over their arms. Two of them even had clothes spread out on cardboards. I thought it would make a good picture of informal trading, and sat down in an outdoor cafe nearby and took out my camera. When I pointed the camera

lens in the direction of the sellers, one of them noticed that a picture was being taken of them, and all of them turned their backs towards me. I realised that I had transgressed the bounds of privacy, and put the camera back in the bag. When I looked up again, two of the sellers stood beside my table and asked whether I took a picture of them. To get out of the situation, I pretended I could not speak Ukrainian, and explained with my fingers that I was taking pictures of the bazaar. The sellers went back to making a living, while I tried to hide my shame the best I could.

This incident was really uncomfortable, and made me realise the importance of lowering my ambitions of finding empirical evidence, and rather respect the privacy of people who were supposed to be the focus of my study.

Qualitative versus quantitative methods

The method used in my fieldwork was therefore mainly participant observation. In addition, I also collected quantitative data from Ukrainian newspapers and journals to supplement the data found in social interaction with my informants. The articles collected contain, for instance, statistical material on average and minimum wages, consumption, and more analytical and expressional views. Some of these articles will be quoted in the text. Further, I also spent some time in libraries, collecting etymological information on some of the terms used in this thesis.

Being mainly based on participant observation, the data collected necessarily depend on my personal understandings of different events. Miller, Grødeland and Koshenkina (2001), in a study of how citizens in four post-socialist countries cope with government bureaucracies, claim that a study based on personal impressions necessarily is a

very personal view of a single individual and it lacks any real sense of quantity, extent or variance. ... Almost by definition, authors are not typical individuals and there is no reason to believe that their experience is typical. Even if the author is typical, we get no sense of whether most citizens are typical or whether there are great variations in experience within the same society (Miller *et al.* 2001:23).

These authors are absolutely right. The pages you are now holding in your hands do *not* contain universal or general conclusions applicable to any geographically or

thematically delimited unit. Nor is this my claim. What these pages *do* contain is *some* examples of what *specific* individuals do in *certain* situations. Nonetheless, this can not be brushed aside as irrelevant because of its limited scope. Quantitative studies collect data from these very same individuals, the only difference being that there are a lot more of them. But when qualitative surveys collect these individuals' perceptions, opinions, and accounts of what they *say* they do, qualitative studies look at what some of them *actually* do. The phenomenon of misrecognition described in the previous chapter helps to illuminate this point. Respondents' perceptions of their own participation, or non-participation, in social phenomena such as *blat* might differ from how they actually act.

Qualitative methods should thus be used to find the relevant categories of a thematically delimited area, before quantitative studies use these categories in questionnaires and interviews to get an overview of variance and validity. Edmund Leach (1969) criticises research that takes the subjects' categories for granted. "In a sense, [the sociologist] is forced to assume that, already, before ever he starts questionnaire enquiries, he knows, by intuition, just what are the significant variables concerning which it is worth while making enquiries" (*ibid*:78). Before using quantitative methods, one therefore has to know what is to be counted and measured. As Karen Widerberg (2001) maintains, "good qualitative research is more theory generating than theory supporting, and can in turn constitute the basis for quantitative research and quantitative support" (*ibid*:32). Qualitative and quantitative methods should not therefore be regarded as incompatible and conflicting, but rather as compatible and supplementing.

3 Private and Public in Post-Soviet Ukraine

If we now turn to the contemporary Ukraine, and more specifically to Lviv, we can ask if and to what extent these Soviet legacies, described in chapter one, are present. Is a strong separation between public and private prevalent in the everyday life of my informants? Do my informants arrange things by *blat*? The distinction between public and private in the contemporary Ukraine will be the theme of this chapter. The next chapter will look into some aspects of my informants' personal networks and outline a framework for an analysis of whether my informants' actions can be described as a continuation of the *blat* institution or not.

The demise of the Soviet Union certainly changed some features of the public/private distinction. The possibility of denunciation is no longer present, at least not in the arbitrary sense as it existed under the Soviet system of terror. Denunciation is now a means that can be used against corrupt officials, and therefore viewed more as a good thing. People are now encouraged by the authorities to report cases of corruption, especially after the 'Orange Revolution'.

Further, there is no longer shortage of consumer goods, which was so characteristic of the Soviet 'economy of shortage'. In Lviv you can get anything you want or need, be it the latest models of computers or mobile phones, or the latest film releases from Hollywood or even Bollywood. If you have the money to pay for it, that is. The competition is now not for scarce resources, but rather for access to money.

What about the 'vacuum space' between the state and the households? The state no longer suppresses organisational life, but it has not flowered in the sense of a Western civil society. The most marked change has probably been in religious life. Religion is no longer seen as a competitor to state ideology, but is in fact supported by the authorities. Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko even said in her inaugural speech to parliament that the first part of her new government's program is to be devoted to the rise of a true spiritual life among Ukrainians (VR 2005). Further, a lot of non-government organisations have been founded, funded by foreign aid programs like USAID and the European Union program TACIS, the women's centre in Lviv being one of them. I

would dare to propose, however, that most of these NGOs are just as much a result of the large foreign aid programs directed at building a civil society in Ukraine, as grass root mass movements. I do not want to discredit the important work performed by many of these NGOs, especially the women's centre in Lviv, but I would still call many of those involved in these NGOs professionals, rather than volunteers.

Svoi versus chuzhyj

In everyday life my informants made a distinction between *svoi* and *chuzhyj*.²² *Svoi* means 'ours' or 'one's own', but not only in a strict sense of private property. *Svoi* is also used to describe relations of familiarity and friendship, and even extended to communities of people, imagined or real, who share one's beliefs, profession and so on (Busel 2001). *Chuzhyj* means 'alien', 'strange', or 'foreign', in the sense of property not belonging to oneself, people with other beliefs, aspirations and interests than oneself, or in the sense of a foreign geographical origin, such as nationality (*ibid*). *Svoi* is used about anything that is 'inside' and not harmful, as opposed to that which is *chuzhyj*, or 'outside' and threatening; the trusted and intimate circle of close friends and family as opposed to strangers; or food made from home-grown vegetables or domestic animals in contrast to food that is bought in stores and potentially dangerous since you do not know what kinds of raw material have been used.

The distinction between *svoi* and *chuzhyj* and their usage on different levels is well exemplified in the conceptualisation of food. As already noted, everything homemade or home-grown is *svoi*, as opposed to food bought in the store or at the bazaar. The food offered at the bazaar is bought only with great cautiousness. My informants often expressed suspicion about the people who sold things at the bazaar, because they allegedly lie unscrupulously about the quality of their products, and may even dilute milk with water or honey with sugar and so on. On a higher level, however, food sold at the bazaar and Ukrainian-produced food in general is regarded as being more *svoi* than imported food. As one informant explained: "Our [Ukrainian] food is all natural, grown in our nutritious black soil. You see, abroad they stuff their food with lots of chemicals. You never know what you are really eating there" (see illustration 10; p.91).

This distinction is consciously used in commercials. For instance, the juice brand *Sadochok*, which claims to be a natural product, has a commercial that ends with a picture of a juice carton, and the words '*Svoye, ridne*' ('Our own, native') written in big letters next to it. *Svoi* is thus a sign of quality and authenticity.

I will provide a more extensive description of the *svoi* category and who belongs to it in the next chapter. The *chuzhyj* category contains images like the 'neighbour', the 'mafia' and the state. On the most experience-near level, *chuzhyj* are people you do not know, and who therefore cannot be trusted. When I suggested to my wife that we might hire a babysitter so that we could go to the cinema or restaurant, she gruffly brushed aside my silliness by saying that she would never leave her child with a *chuzhyj*. Further, neighbours are still regarded to some degree as being the 'other', not because they are potential informers, but because of their physical proximity (see next chapter). By neighbours I not only mean people living next to each other, but I am using the term in a more expansive sense. Fellow citizens pressing against you on a packed tram or in a never-ending queue at the post office may also be an irritation because of their physical proximity. One way of evading such irritations is by seeking some personal link to public services (see *Case II: Finding a Doctor*).²³

The 'mafia' and the state are often conceptualised as one, in that the latter is seen as ruled by the former. However, none of my informants could give an exact answer as to what the 'mafia' really is. It is a somewhat mythical conception, used about a formless and unnameable 'creature', spreading evil and enriching itself at society's expense.²⁴ The closest and most concrete answer I got was probably the oligarchs, or those few who enriched themselves during the murky privatisation process of state property, and who now have strong influence on certain political forces.

Two important categories of people that are seen as connected in a conspiratorial manner to the 'mafia' and state are *zhydy* and *moskali*.²⁵ Some of my informants repeatedly claimed that the corrupt authorities are 'actually' governed by people belonging to these two categories. *Zhyd* is one of two terms for 'Jew', the other being *yevrej*. The form *yevrej* stems etymologically from the Latin form *Hebraeus* and is a neutral label for the ethnic-religious category (Mel'nychuk 1985). The form *zhyd*,

however, stems from the Hebraic name Judas and has clear, negative connotations, i.e. it is associated with a specific way of acting, being treacherous and *hytryj* (sly).

Analogously, the term *moskal'* is a negative term for Russians, associated with rudeness, vulgarity and chauvinism, while the term *rosijskyj* is a neutral term denoting a person of Russian ethnicity. Most of my informants speak Ukrainian in everyday interactions, and sometimes they used the term *moskal'* to describe people living in the Ukraine who only speak Russian. People from the eastern Ukraine in particular were referred to as *moskali*, since they had been under Russian authority for so many years that they were regarded as more Russian than Ukrainian.

Zhydy and *moskali* are used to describe people behaving in certain ways and they can just as well be used about ethnic Ukrainians who speaks Russian, acting either slyly or rudely. The underlying premise is, however, that *zhydy* and *moskali* are *chuzhi*, i.e. people who are not to be trusted and people with whom one should not get involved. This is expressed in the old saying “*Moskal' is not one's brother*” (*Москаль не свій брат*) (Nomys 2004:37).

The 'Orange Revolution'

Dmytro Korchynsky, a controversial television host, leader of the nationalist party Brotherhood and candidate in the 2004 presidential elections said two months before the elections:

The situation in [Ukraine] could improve in two ways. Either all of us, as one, begin to firmly and selflessly work for the good of the Motherland, or angels descend from heaven and, without our participation, arrange everything for us here for the better. Inasmuch as I'm a rationalist and don't believe in miracles, I'll wait for the angels (Kyiv Post 2004a).

Olena, one of my informants, made a similar statement: “I am a patriot, but generally speaking I don't like Ukrainians. They are envious and only think about themselves. People put a great effort into pulling down others that have a better life than themselves”.

The massive demonstrations against election fraud in the aftermath of the elections – the so-called 'Orange Revolution' – *were* a small miracle, insofar as no angels were seen

descending from heaven. The revolution was a great victory not only for the political opposition, but also for the Ukrainians' spirit of community. This came as a shock to many of my informants, and not the least to the authorities themselves. As one informant told me emotionally: "Ukrainians are finally acting like human beings". Five of my informants went to Kyiv to support candidate Viktor Yushchenko, and they later told me that there was an extraordinary atmosphere of friendship and togetherness. They considered their efforts a fight against the 'mafia' and the oligarchs that had been ruling Ukraine for the last 13 years. It was thus a struggle against the *chuzhyj* authorities.

The symbols used in the revolution played on the necessity to stand together against this common enemy, the authorities. The revolution was thus such a success because it expanded the category of *svoi* to include not only one's closest friends and family, but also fellow citizens. The slogan chanted by the hundred of thousands in the streets of Kyiv, Lviv and other cities, was 'Together we are many, we will not be subdued' ('Разом нас багато, нас не подолати'). I will provide an extract from one of the songs that was performed on the stage in the Independence Square, because it splendidly exemplifies the revolution's onset against the lack of patriotism and community in the Ukrainian society. The song was written and preformed by the rap group Tartak (2005):

I don't want to

...

We have lost our culture, forgotten our history,

We feel superfluous on our own territory.

We believe strangers (*chuzhi*), in our own (*svoi*) we do not trust

...

*Kum*²⁶ goes against *kum*, brother against brother.

The national idea is a means for speculation.

We won a state, but lost our nation...

Everyone thinks of himself in his own (*svoi*) house on the outskirts.

In reality it is so easy to change your life!

Just go out into the street, just clean up the rubbish,

Grow fond of our (*svoi*) land, our (*svoi*) own nature,
To feel part of a single nation.
Because we are not unrelated, we are Ukrainians!
Enough spitting in our grandparents' well,
Enough of being afraid of believing in better times,
And never change our own (*svoi*) for what is strange (*chuzhyj*)

...

The demonstrations also split the Ukrainian people, however, and this occurred between those who supported the opposition candidate Yushchenko and those who supported Viktor Yanukovich, the candidate from the power elite. Viktor Yanukovich's supporters were mainly from the Russian dominated eastern regions of the Ukraine, and most of my informants placed them into the category *moskali*, i.e. uncultured, uneducated and chauvinistic people. In this sense they were regarded as *chuzhyj*, because they were seen as promoting Russian interests, and therefore strangers to the Ukrainian nation which was fighting the authorities and the cold on the Independence Square.

4 Personal Networks

Chuzhyj, especially persons with whom you have some kind of business, such as a shop assistant in a public store, or a bureaucrat at the communal office, tend to have an attitude of indifference, or outright rudeness. I saw this indifference in Roman's treatment of his customers as well, even though he runs a private enterprise, and is dependent on sales to get an income. *Svoi*, on the other hand, are characterised by mutual trust and affection. I would like to provide an illustration with a Ukrainian proverb one of my informants used: "One's own shirt is closer to the body" (*Своя сорочка ближче тіла*). This does not only apply to close friends and family, but also to an extended group of people you know. For instance, by keeping to one or two regular stores, you can get to know the shop assistants, and establish a quasi-personal relationship with them. These shop assistants will tell you which cheese has gone out of date, which sausages taste best and even let you buy on tick. Such information and favours are seldom given by clerks you never have seen before, at least this is what many of my informants think. Roman, too, has his *postijni klijenty* (regular customers) and he takes extra care of them and often puts aside new or much sought-after discs for them. He does not even know some of these regular customers by name, just by face. It is, therefore, important to avoid dealing with strangers, and keep instead within one's circle of *svoi* or known faces. This will be demonstrated later in our second, extended case.

A marked feature of my informants' everyday activities was, therefore, their extensive use of personal networks to solve different problems. As Ulf Hannerz argues, network is a good analytical conception in complex societies in general (Hannerz 1980:164). It is probably even more relevant in the post-Soviet Ukraine, where, as shown already, networking was an essential part of coping in the Soviet 'economy of shortage'. Scarcity, now in the form of time and money, and a high degree of bureaucracy are still obstacles in the everyday life, and networking therefore becomes a way to make informal arrangements when the formal ones fail or are limiting.

In this chapter I shall look at some of the categories in my informants' networks. I will employ what Hannerz calls an ego-centred network, i.e., "...by anchoring it at some particular point in the structure of social relationships, such as in one individual (...) and move outward from there as far as it appears necessary or useful" (Hannerz 1980:178). My *particular point* is Roman and his wife Nadia. I will not engage in any 'network fetishism', that is, I do not intend to spend any time considering the morphological features of my informants' personal networks, such as density, clusters, span, multiplicity etc. The point here is not to study the networks per se, but rather to see them as an integral part of the everyday life of my informants. With this in mind, it is important to point out that network analysis is not a theory, but rather an analytical instrument. Jeremy Boissevain (1979) puts it this way

Network analysis, while not a theory, has theoretical implications. It is an analytical instrument which views circles of relatives and friends, coalitions, groups and business houses ... as a scatterings of points connected by lines that form networks. The points are of course the unit of analysis, the lines social relations (ibid:392).

I will follow Anna-Maria Salmi's (2003) call for a differentiation of personal networks into various groups of social links. I will describe different kinds of positively valuated network relations; *kumy*, family and friends are all regarded as *svoi*; colleagues and neighbours are two somewhat mixed groups of *svoi* and *chuzhyj*; while acquaintances belong to an ambiguous group that is neither *svoi* nor *chuzhyj*. This will form a background for the cases, for the analyses of how networks can be used in everyday life and how relations with officials can be personalised if such network links are missing.

Roman the Salesman

Roman is a man of many words. The perfect salesman, you might say. He does also possess, however, the usual characteristics of a salesman or saleswoman so often encountered in Ukrainian stores, i.e. a disturbing indifference towards the customers until there is no doubt that money will change hands. Roman explains this behaviour as a consequence of experience. He knows that a lot of people will ask about prices and different artists and films, without even thinking of buying anything. Standing in his

stall from early morning till late in the afternoon in the freezing cold, he saves his efforts and concentrates on keeping warm and mingling with his colleagues on neighbouring stalls.

We had met a couple times before the fieldwork started, since Roman is a friend of a friend. Roman soon introduced me to his wife, Nadia, and I spent quite a lot of time sitting by their kitchen table, talking about politics, world events, and everyday problems, while tasting Nadia's freshly made *borshch* (beetroot soup) or *varenyky* (boiled dough filled with potatoes or cabbage), and Roman's homemade wine. After Roman moved his business to the indoor section of the bazaar, the kitchen table became our only meeting place. Roman and Nadia live in a three room apartment with their 15-year old son, Mis'ko²⁷, and Nadia's mother, Iryna. Nadia works in a privately owned pharmacy in the city centre, and her mother is a pensioner and does most of the cleaning and cooking.

Their apartment is on the third floor in a five-storey building just outside the centre. It is a nice neighbourhood, with lots of trees and green spots of grass, but the building itself is a '*Khrushchovka*', a popular name for the boring grey Soviet architectural style, characterised by low ceilings and small rooms (see illustration 11; p.91). The rooms are compactly decorated, with all their personal belongings stuffed in cupboards or placed on shelves. The parents and Mis'ko have their own bedrooms, while Nadia's mother sleeps on the bed couch in the living room.

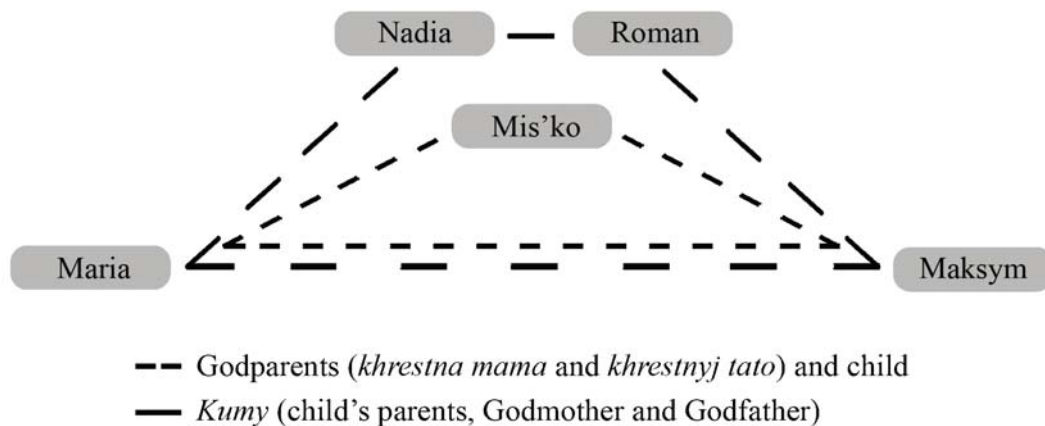
Kumy

Roman has no formal education in marketing or commerce, and was introduced to the life at the bazaar through his friend Maksym, who used to work within the bazaar's administration. Maksym's and Roman's friendship goes back to their childhood and they still regard each other as close friends. Their relationship has even been formalised as they are *kumy*, in that, Maksym is *khrestnyj tato*, or Godfather, to Roman's son, Mis'ko.

Kumstvo is the triangular relationship between the child's parents, *khrestnyj tato*, and *khrestna mama*, or Godmother. The child's mother and the Godmother are addressed as *kuma* by the others in the triangle, and the child's father and the Godfather are addressed

as *kum*. Thus, while *khrestnyj tato* and *khrestna mama* are links between the child and its Godparents, *kumstvo* links the child's parents and the Godparents (see figure 1). The Godmother is chosen from the mother's network, while the Godfather is chosen from the father's network.

Figure 1:



Thus, Maksym was chosen because of his longstanding friendship with Roman. Nadia asked their neighbour, Maria, to be Godmother. She told me that they had moved into their current apartment six months before Mis'ko was born, so her friendship with Maria was quite new at the time of the Christening. Maria and Maksym had only met once before they became *kumy*, at Roman's birthday party. They still call each other *kum* and *kuma*, but in reality, their relationship does not involve anything more than occasional meetings in Roman and Nadia's apartment.

The *kumstvo* institution not only formalises relationships, but most often strengthens them as well. Kari-Anne Ulfsnes (1999), in a study from Romania, claims that the relation between Godparents and parents, called *nasie*, is an institution that integrates people from different social-economical groups, by expanding family ties, evident in the use of family metaphors. Elisabeth L. Fürst (2004) argues along the same lines concerning the Moldovan version, *komovstvo*. She claims that it works to establish family ties with non-relatives and thereby to expand the family. *Kumy* is, however, chosen from

both friends *and* relatives. Nevertheless, the bonds between *kumy* are represented as just as strong as bonds within the closest family. As an old Ukrainian saying goes: '*Kum* should treat *kuma* as his own sister' (Panasenko 2004:250).²⁸ The relationship thus implies a moral obligation. *Kumy* should help out, not only concerning the child that binds them, but also as mutual help within the triangular relationship. When asked to name and characterise their friends, Roman and Nadia both said that Maksym and Maria respectively were among their most intimate and trusted friends.

The link between Godmother and Godfather is somewhat special, because it brings together people who are often nothing more than distant acquaintances, coming from two different networks. The *kumstvo* institution therefore not only strengthens bonds which already exist between friends and relatives, but makes new ones as well. However, as in the case with Maksym and Maria, the relationship between Godmother and Godfather is most often not as strong as the one between the child's parents and his or her Godparents.

The *kumstvo* institution is also expansive to a certain degree, since a Godmother or a Godfather is not normally chosen twice. Parents therefore choose new Godparents for their second child, and so on.

Family

Family constitutes the fundament of personal networks, and is the archetype of *svoi*. While family members may not necessarily socialise as frequently as friends, they are regarded as an invaluable source of moral and material support, which can be mobilised in difficult situations (see *Case IV: Making a Passport*). Some of my informants even used the terms *brat* (brother) and *sestra* (sister) in an extended manner to include cousins and other relatives in their own generation, showing the affectionate quality of family relations.

Nadia's brother lives and works in Portugal with his wife. They went there three years ago on a tourist visa, and stayed there to work illegally. Nadia's brother sends money back to their mother every second month, which is an important supplement to the household budget. Nadia's mother Iryna thus contributes to the household economy,

both with the money sent by her son and with her pension, and fulfils an important role by cleaning, cooking and paying bills.

Roman has no brothers or sisters, and his parents live in the *selo* (countryside), about 50 km from Lviv. The bazaar is closed every Monday, so he goes to his parents to help out once or twice a month. His parents are both pensioners, and the spring, summer and autumn are spent busily taking care of their two plots where they grow potatoes, carrots, beetroot, tomatoes, corn and other crops. They also have a dozen chickens, a pig and a cow. Whenever Roman goes to the *selo*, he always comes back with his car full of vegetables and meat, either raw or conserved, depending on the season. They also have some raspberry bushes, and Roman uses the berries to make his own homemade wine, for which he is famous among his friends. Whenever Roman pours out the last drops from another of his bottles of wine and tells me to take some more of Nadia's *varenyky*, even though I was already full two portions ago, he smiles and says with a fatherly assurance: 'Don't be afraid! It is all *svoe*!'

Friends and colleagues

Friends are also important in personal networks. The Ukrainian word for male and female friend is *druh* and *podruha* respectively. My informants, however, more often use the terms *koleha* and *kolezhanka* about their friends. The intimacy of relations with different friends can be hard to spot, since *koleha* also means colleague or workmate. The categories of friends and colleagues do overlap to some degree.

When I asked Nadia to characterise her relations with some of her friends, she graded them according to intimacy and trust. She regards Maria as being her closest friend, and it is to Maria she would turn first if she needed help or advice. She then named four other friends, whom she characterised as being in 'second line'. She had either studied with or worked with three of these women, and the fourth was Natalya, Maksym's wife. While she has almost daily contact with Maria, either by talking on the phone or sitting with her in the kitchen, she has contact with these 'second line' friends less often. They occasionally call one another to have a chat, and sometimes meet at the

other's places, or go to a cafe. The meetings with both Maria and these 'second line' friends almost always meant talking over a glass or two of wine or cognac.

The 'third line' friends consist of colleagues she is currently working with, and whom she sees on a daily basis. She sometimes goes with them to a cafe or a pizzeria after work, but they seldom visit one another at home. She does not regard these colleague-friends as very close, and does not share her most personal concerns with them. They are, however, important in providing her with links from their personal networks whenever she needs to solve some problem.

Roman did not explicitly divide his friends in the same manner as Nadia, but he too seemed to regard his friendship with some of them as closer than with others. The colleagues at the bazaar, for instance, were not his closest friends, although he had daily contact with them as long as he was working in the outdoor section. The reciprocal relationship with these friends would involve nothing more than buying each other tea or coffee, or lending each other small amounts of money. With his closer friends, like Maksym, he would sometimes go out for a drink and play billiards. If he called his friends it would not be to chat, but rather to arrange something or to fix a problem.

Colleagues are a somewhat ambiguous group when it comes to placing them within a *svoi/chuzhyj* distinction. When I asked Nadia to place her friends along the *svoi/chuzhyj* distinction, she said she regarded Maria and the three 'second-liners' as being *svoi*, but she would at best describe her colleagues as *znajomi* (acquaintances), i.e. neither *svoi* nor *chuzhyj* (see below). She even regarded some colleagues with whom she has a strained relationship as *chuzhyj*. Roman did not find the *svoi/chuzhyj* distinction very relevant at all, and just referred to his colleagues as friends.

Neighbours

Of the ten families which live on the same staircase in their block, Roman and Nadia have good relations with three of them, a non-talking and even hostile relationship with three, and an ambivalent relationship to the last four families. The hostilities are most often connected to bad experiences in the past. The family that lives above them once forgot to turn off the water tap which resulted in a ruined wall in Roman's and Nadia's

bedroom, and the neighbours refuse to provide compensation. The elderly lady living under them has made unwarranted accusation against them and yelled at Mis'ko several times for making too much noise in the stairways, and Nadia refers to her as being *nenormalna* (not normal). They do not talk to or even greet the third neighbour when they meet him in the stairway. He is an older man, whom they refer to as the *KGBist*. According to Roman, this *KGBist* presumably worked for the secret service during Soviet times, and therefore never smiles or greets them. Nadia's mother, however, occasionally speaks to his wife.

In addition to Maria, Nadia has occasional contact with another neighbour, Olena. When I asked Nadia to characterise her neighbours, she said she would only call Maria *svoi*. Olena occupies a place somewhere in between, since she is a *znajoma* (acquaintance), and therefore neither *svoi* nor *chuzhyj*. The rest she would term as *chuzhi lyudy* (strangers), or just *susidy* (neighbours).

To some extent, this seems to agree with what Anna-Maria Salmi (2003) found in her study of neighbours' role in Russia. She analyses neighbours' important role in terms of mutual help, because of their physical proximity, and because they give personal networks occupational heterogeneity (*ibid*:165-6). She also found that negative relations between neighbours were results of occurrences in the past, and not connected to the more general morality of 'obligation to help' between neighbours (*ibid*:157).

Acquaintances

Znajomi, or acquaintances, is a somewhat ambiguous category between friends and strangers. They are neither really friends, nor really strangers. Nadia used *znajomi* about friends of her friends, and former and current colleagues that she does not regard as being close. This ambiguity can to some degree be seen in the way acquaintances are addressed. Friends call each other by their first names, and sometimes the more affectionate diminutive forms, like Romchyk or Romko for Roman and Nadika or Nadusya for Nadia. Strangers often call each other by first name and *po-batkovi*, that is, using the patronymic. Roman's father is called Mykhajlo, so Roman's full name is Roman Mykhajlovich Kovalenko.²⁹ Acquaintances, however, can be addressed with

either of these two forms, i.e. first name with or without patronymic. Acquaintances of older age are normally addressed by their first name and patronymic. Colleagues are either addressed by their first name or their first name and patronymic. At the bazaar, Roman called all his colleagues by their first name. Maria's husband, Oleh, who works as a doctor in a hospital, calls his colleagues by their first name and patronymic.

Social distance is also expressed in the use of *Vy* and *ty*, both meaning 'you'. *Vy* is the polite form, and is used when addressing strangers and acquaintances of older age. *Ty* is used among friends and to address younger people. To address a stranger as *ty* is regarded as rude and *nekulturno* (uncultured). Prior to the presidential elections, I interviewed the press officer at Viktor Yushchenko's office in Lviv. During our conversation, in which both of us used the polite *Vy* form, another man joined in, and at one point the press officer thought the man addressed her as *ty*. She then made it absolutely clear to him that they were not in any close relationship, and that she did not approve of his informal tone. The man apologised, and reassured her that he did not say *ty*, and that she had probably misheard him.

Further, friends greet each other with the informal form *pryvit* (hello, hi), while strangers greet each other with the more formal *dobryj denj* (good day). Acquaintances use either of the two forms. Once I greeted the doctor of our child with *pryvit*, and my wife, a little embarrassed, told me to use *dobryj denj* instead. Later she told me she regards the doctor as a stranger, and therefore uses the polite form *Vy*. Further, she is not sure of what her patronymic is, so she refrains from addressing her by name at all.

The first case I present shows one social happening that can be seen as confirming and strengthening *svoi*-ties, by coming together to consume food and drink. Alcohol is an important part of such social occasions, and the meaning of alcohol will be analysed.

5 Case I: Celebrating Roman the Salesman

During the fieldwork Roman turned 39 years. I was invited to a 'small gathering of friends' as Roman called it, to mark the occasion. I did not have much time to get him a present as the party was to take place that very same evening but I managed to buy him a nice leather wallet at the bazaar. I put the wallet in a gift box and wrapped it in a plastic bag.

I was the first to arrive at the party. Roman was in the shower, getting ready after a long day at the bazaar. Nadia was in the kitchen with her mother, and the smell of *kovbaza* (smoked sausages) and new-cooked *varenyky* met me in the corridor. She was clearly angry, and made no effort to hide it. Roman had treated his colleagues at the bazaar to food and drinks, and had evidently drunk so much alcohol that he had forgotten to buy fresh bread and soft drinks for the children.

After Roman had come out of the bathroom, I greeted him and gave him the plastic bag with the wallet. To my surprise he thanked me and put the plastic bag on the table, without even looking into the bag. I then took the box out of the bag and handed it to him, expecting him to open it, look surprised and thank me for the choice of gift and perhaps even praise my good taste. No such thing did happen. He took the box, thanked me again, and placed the box on the table without opening it. I felt cheated of the pleasure of giving.

Roman's parents arrived soon after, followed by Maria and her husband, Oleh. Roman's mother and Maria both had flowers with them, and these they gave to Nadia. Maria also had a decorated paper bag that she gave to Roman whilst congratulating him. Roman thanked her and put the bag on the windowsill. He then asked us to sit down round the kitchen table, which was laden with various small dishes. Roman opened a bottle of *horilka*³⁰ and a bottle of red wine, and filled the empty glasses. His father picked up his glass of *horilka* and proposed a toast, and the rest of the company followed suit by raising their glasses. He said some affectionate words in his son's honour and wished him happiness, prosperity and a kind wife. He ended the short speech by saying '*za tebe*' ('for you'), and the others joined him and repeated 'for you'.

Maksym, Natalya and their son came later. It got quite crowded in the small kitchen, but after every toast the men went out into the stairways to have a smoke. Even Oleh and I, who didn't smoke, followed the other men. The themes discussed by this 'stairway community' of males were mostly concerned with typically masculine interests, such as cars and fuel prices, drinking stories, and analysis of football results. Themes that were touched upon around the kitchen table when everyone was present were of a more general character. Some of the themes that were discussed during the evening were labour emigration of Ukrainians (everyone knew someone who was working abroad), politics (mostly about corrupt politicians), banks (whether or not it is safe to place savings in banks), and holidays (where to go in the summer).

Whenever everyone was gathered in the kitchen, Roman would pour alcohol into every glass, and someone would make a toast, either to honour Roman, Nadia or Roman's parents. The men drinking *horilka* would then empty their glasses in one swallow and eat a piece of *kovbasa* or bread.

When Roman's parents left the party to catch the last bus going to the *selo*, the company broke up, and I took a taxi with Maksym and his family.

The meaning of alcohol

Alcohol is almost omnipresent in the everyday life of my informants (see illustration 12; p.92). It is an indivisible part of a whole variety of *occasions*, like celebrations and sociability among friends. It is also a liquid to which a great symbolic importance is attached. Alcohol is most often consumed with *svoi*, and friendship is confirmed by the ritual of drinking.

The emphasis on occasions is important, because the morality of drinking is closely connected to the occasion for drinking. Or more precisely, drinking without a proper occasion is considered negative, and mostly associated with drunks and alcoholics. As one of my informants said: "If you drink without an occasion, you are an alcoholic. So you make an occasion". David Koester (2003) found the same in Russia, where "...getting drunk without purpose is not considered 'respectable'" (*ibid*:44). This is also reflected in most television commercials for *horilka* or other sorts of alcohol, in which it is

the social occasion that is in focus. For instance, there is a commercial for a *horilka* brand which shows this very clearly. The whole scene is taken in a living room, with three male friends sitting on the sofa watching TV. Between the sofa and the television is a small table, covered with different dishes: sliced sausages, gherkins and tomatoes, *salo* (boiled or smoked fat) and a bottle of *horilka*. The friends are nicely dressed, with colourful party hats on their heads, and seem to be enjoying each other's company. Someone who is supposed to be the President is giving his New Year's speech on TV. As soon as the President starts the countdown to New Year, the friends raise their small glasses with *horilka* and prepare to greet the New Year. As the clock strikes twelve, they drink up and greet each other. One of them then picks up the remote control for the video player and rewinds the tape, so that the President is again seen starting to count down to the New Year. The glasses are refilled and yet again raised to toast the New Year.

The friends in the commercial thus have an occasion to drink, though be it of their own making. One of Koester's informants drank to toast the birthday of a distant cousin not seen in 25 years. In everyday life, there are so many ritualised celebrations that the need to make up an occasion is seldom necessary. The great religious celebrations, such as Easter and Christmas, involve many days of visiting friends and family, sitting by a table covered with food and drinks. Then there are weddings, Christenings, birthdays, name days and Constitution Day, all important occasions which include drinking alcohol. In addition, almost every profession has its own special day of celebration. This is a remnant of the Soviet system, and involves everyone belonging to a particular profession taking the day off, and usually drinking with colleagues. Teachers, firemen, and not the least cosmonauts, to name but a few, all have their official days of celebration. In a parliamentary hearing on a new law to fight alcoholism in the Ukraine, Deputy Yevhen Hirnyk said: "During the decade under Kuchma's rule, a paradoxical situation has taken form, where there are more celebrations in a year than there are days. And all these celebrations and dates are in some way or another marked, starting with birthdays" (Hirnyk 2005).

Roman's birthday was very much considered to be an occasion to drink and celebrate. Roman and Nadia had thus bought in three bottles of *horilka* and three bottles

of red wine for the occasion. At the end of the party Roman even opened one of his bottles of home-made raspberry wine to let the guests have a taste. Further, the very act of friends coming together is seen as an occasion to drink. Whenever Nadia and Maria meet, they always sit in the kitchen, most often talking over a glass of wine, '*shampanske*' or cognac. Their meetings are not regular, more spontaneous. Their meetings are also 'women only', as Roman is either at the bazaar, out with friends or watching TV in the living room. When Roman meets his male friends, they go out to a bar to drink beer and *horilka* and sometimes play billiards. Roman and his friends never sit at home drinking, unless they meet accompanied by their wives. They then eat and drink together in the kitchen, and sometimes the men go into the living room to talk, while the women stay in the kitchen.

As already pointed out, alcohol consumed in connection with an occasion is positively valued. Such occasions are celebrated according to some standard unwritten 'rules', which give them the appearance of a ritual. In the same way as at Roman's birthday, all participants sit around the table, which is covered with different *zakusky* (*hors d'oeuvres* or snacks), plates, glasses for wine, beer, juice or *kompot* (a homemade refreshing drink made by boiling dried berries and fruits), smaller glasses for *horilka*, and forks. The participants thus form a circle facing each other, with food and drinks in the centre. The male host, in our case Roman, or one of the male guests, takes the responsibility for filling into the empty glasses. Then one of the participants, sometimes the host or sometimes a guest, picks up the glass filled with alcohol, looks at the others present while holding the glass over the table and proposes a toast. The others follow by picking up their glasses, and the initiator of the toast says some words, either praising the hosts, the person whose birthday it is, his or her parents, the bride and groom and so on. The toast is often ended by '*za tebe*' or '*za vas*', i.e. 'to you' in the singular and plural respectively, or simply '*na zdorovya*' ('to health'). The other participants repeat 'to you' or 'to health', the glasses are either slightly lowered as an explicit greeting towards the others or clinked together over the table, and everyone drinks up. The third toast is reserved for a general toast, 'to love', and the last toast is often facetiously made 'to the horse' ('*na konya*'), when it is time to ride home safely.

When it comes to the type of alcohol consumed, men most often drink *horilka*, sometimes combined with beer, or just with juice or *kompot*. *Horilka* is brand spirits bought in a store, while the homemade version is called *samohonka*. While my informants in the city only drank *horilka*, the informants in the countryside drank either *horilka* or *samohonka*. The informants in the countryside claimed that bottles of *horilka* sometimes contain illegally made spirits, sometimes even containing lethal methanol. *Samohonka*, on the other hand, has the quality guarantee of being *svoi*, and is therefore safe to consume (not considering terrible hangovers and hazardous drink-driving).

Women also drink *horilka*, but often enjoy red or white wine, '*shampanske*' or cognac. Most of the alcohol consumed is produced in the Ukraine, and imported brands are only rarely bought. The Ukrainian brands are much cheaper than the imported ones, and are of a good quality.

As Mary Douglas (1987) points out, "drinking is essentially a social act, performed in a recognized social context" (*ibid*:4). Janine Wedel (1986), describing private life in socialist Poland, likewise claims that "no event is social without food and drink" (*ibid*:26). I find Wedel's formulation more accurate in describing the Ukrainian case, since, as pointed out above, drinking does *not* have to be a social act, and drinking without a social occasion is negatively valued. As Wedel's formulation shows, however, most social events do include drinking. In any case, the ritualised social act of drinking has a great symbolic value in that it confirms friendships. When friends sit around the same table, sharing food and drinks, the social bonds connecting them are confirmed every time a toast is made in honour of their friends. These bonds are made explicitly visible by bringing the glasses together so that they touch each other. Just as a handshake or a kiss on the cheek is a symbolic transcendence of the boundary between the self and the other, bringing glasses of alcohol together marks the communion of drinking. The focal point is therefore friendship and togetherness, symbolised by the act of drinking.

This show of togetherness can be violated, however, by refusing to drink. Refusing to participate in a toast is almost regarded as a personal insult, since it is also a refusal to wish someone good health. Even dregs of alcohol left in a glass may be seen as a semi-refusal, and are often called 'tears' (*sl'ozy*). As the sayings goes: "Drink up, so no tears

are left" (*Винивай, щоб на сльозу не оставалось*) (Panasenko 2004:308). For men, leaving any *horilka* in the glass after the toast is regarded as not very masculine, and the whole contents of the small glasses normally goes down in one. I was fortunate enough to be excused from this rule as I was regarded a foreigner and thus not used to the Ukrainian way of drinking (or perhaps regarded as not very masculine). However, when I did manage to empty the glass in one swallow, the remark was often made that perhaps I did have some Ukrainian blood after all.

To use Erving Goffman's terminology, drinking is fundamentally a backstage or private activity. Joseph Gusfield (1981, referred in Douglas 1987:8) thus analyses alcohol as being the opposite of coffee; while coffee cues the shift from playtime to work, alcohol cues the shift from work to playtime. Alcohol is consumed with friends, in an atmosphere in which everyone can relax and be themselves. Alcohol can even be said to make people more 'themselves' than they otherwise would be. As Koester notes: "One gets drunk with individuals one trusts, with people one is sure will not criticize one for having been drunk" (Koester 2003:44). The trust in drinking partners does not only extend to a valuation of drunkenness, but also to the letting go of one's 'public face' and "bare one's soul" (Wedel 1986:26). Alcohol is an elixir that to a certain degree relaxes the need of 'presentation of self', and rather makes possible a legitimate expression of emotions that are not usually shown in sober interactions. Drinking is therefore an activity mostly performed among *svoi* (see illustration 13; p.92). Roman's birthday party included only people he regards as *svoi*, and was quite characteristic of the social gatherings of my informants. Janine Wedel (1986) writes about the same kind of drinking patterns in Poland: "People of the same *środowisko* (social circle) participate in celebrations with vodka. ... Drinking vodka together signifies intimacy and recognition as *swoj człowiek*" (*ibid*:27).

The meaning of alcohol described in this chapter, i.e. the symbolic qualities of friendship and intimacy attached to alcohol, will be important in the analysis of what I refer to as personalisation of relations (see *Case III: Fixing the Central Heating*).

6 Case II: Finding a doctor

Working at the bazaar is far from relaxing. Sometimes there are no customers at all, and Roman complains about the slow sale. At other times, especially on Saturdays and Sundays, there are too many people by the small stall, so Roman has to keep an eye on the discs as well as answer any questions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Roman has high blood pressure. He has been troubled by this for some time, and Nadia finally talked him into seeing a doctor. She called her *kuma* Maria, who has a friend that works as a cardiologist at a public hospital in Lviv. Maria made an appointment with the doctor on Roman's behalf.

The next day Roman went to the hospital to be examined. He had already prepared a black plastic bag with a box of assorted chocolates, and a \$10 note that he slipped under the plastic of the box. He told me he had entered the cardiologist's office, and introduced himself as coming 'from Maria'. The doctor took his blood pressure, and a nurse took a cardiogram. He slipped a 5 hryvny note into the nurse's pocket as she went out. After the nurse had left the room he placed the plastic bag on the doctor's desk, and said it was something sweet. The doctor thanked him, without investigating its contents any further, and then led him to another room where he was to take an EKG test. In the corridor Roman asked the doctor how much he should give the person doing the test. The doctor said 20 hryvny was enough. After the EKG he had an ultrasound test, and popped 20 hryvny in a pocket there as well.

I have had two experiences with public Ukrainian hospitals myself. The first time was four years ago when I was studying Ukrainian language in Lviv, and ate too much *chuzhyj* food in local restaurants, and the other when my wife gave birth to our daughter during the fieldwork. The impression that sticks in my mind is of long, dark corridors with high ceilings and worn-out linoleum that only partly covers a grey wooden floor and the sound of fast-moving nurses dressed in white coats. However, the most striking feature is the endless queues of people, waiting by badly marked doors.

Roman thus avoided queuing for different examinations by seeing a doctor he has a 'relation' to (in this case, a friend of his *kuma*). The doctor guided him past the queues

without giving the waiting patients any explanation, thereby saving Roman hours of queuing, which meant he did not have to be away from the bazaar for too long.

About three months later Nadia had chest pains and went to the same doctor. She told me that she had taken an EKG, and gave the nurse 20 hryvny. She then wanted to give the doctor \$10 after the consultation, but the doctor refused to take it, and clearly said that she regarded Nadia as a friend. Telling me about this, Nadia expressed a certain degree of frustration over this explicit declaration of friendship, because she now felt that she owed the doctor a favour. She thus decided to give the doctor some exclusive face cream as a New Year gift.

Another of my informants, Lesya, had a rash on her neck that had bothered her for quite some time. She called her friend Oksana who knows a dermatologist, and asked for the address to this doctor's office. She also inquired what this doctor normally took as a 'fee'.³¹ She told me she had introduced herself as coming 'from Oksana', and put 50 hryvny in the pocket of the doctor's coat. When I asked about the doctor's reaction, she said he did not look at the money and did not say anything.

The doctor asked me to have some tests done, but there was such a long queue at the hospital where you can take the test that I did not have the time to wait. I went to a private clinic and did the tests there instead. The next time I went to the doctor he let me skip the queue. He told the others waiting that he would just see a friend first. When I said I had the test done at a private clinic, he was surprised that I did not know anyone at the hospital. If he had known, he would have sent me to a friend of his, so I wouldn't have had to queue.

Lesya told me this in the presence of her mother, who became indignant: "You paid him [the doctor], so he should have sent you to somebody he knows in the first place and not just to the hospital where the queues are so long".

The use of personal networks

If we look more closely at this extended case, the most prominent feature is how the actors use their personal networks in interaction with a public service that is supposed to be free of charge and equally available to all citizens. Both Nadia and Lesya explained this from a perspective of getting a good treatment: "You just can't trust any doctor to do a good job". This was not just some unfounded prejudice against one category of

professionals, but rather expressed as a negative conception of public employees in general, based on prior experience.

Neither Nadia nor Lesya consider the doctors they went to as *svoi*. They are more *svoi* than *chuzhi*, however, since they are part of their friends' networks. Nadia even considers the cardiologist to be an acquaintance, since they have met in Maria's kitchen on several occasions. The cardiologist, in turn, can even be said to regard Nadia as a friend. Lesya had not met the dermatologist before, and therefore only considers him as a friend of a friend.

I received different answers when I asked my informants why they gave money to doctors, when according to Ukrainian law healthcare should be free of charge. The most frequent answer was the low wages doctors receive, and the moral responsibility to give a sign of gratitude. Some informants pointed to the fact that they might need the services of the same doctor in the future. During a discussion with an informant, I asked him when he usually gave money to a doctor, and he replied that the most natural time was after the consultation was over and he was about to leave. I asked why he did not just shake the doctor's hand, say 'thank you very much' and leave. He then looked at me as if I was a naive child asking too many silly questions, and answered with a question: "And what if you need to see that same doctor again, do you think he will give you good treatment?"

One informant had experienced this when she was pregnant some years ago. Two months into the pregnancy she had been to some kind of treatment, and she did not give the doctor any money for it. When she returned to the same doctor a second time five months later, the doctor had explicitly told her that no one would give her a proper examination since she had not 'settled the bill' (*розрахуватися*) the last time.

Yet other informants said that they gave doctors money because they were forced to, and not out of gratitude or out of concern for future consultations. In one case, the patient, a daughter of an informant, was seriously ill, and the doctor actually demanded extra payment to help her. This was very negatively viewed by the patient's family.

A legacy of blat?

How can we categorise the actions of Roman, Nadia and Lesya? The informants themselves evaluated their actions in terms of getting the most out of an insufficient healthcare system, either by ensuring better quality of the service or spending less time. The key words are *quality* and *time*, both objects of scarcity in the everyday life of my informants. In encounters with impersonal medical care, my informants often felt deprived of both. By finding a personal link to a public service, for instance a friend of a friend, they could ensure that they would be regarded as being a bit more *svoi* than *chuzhyj*, and treated accordingly.

Their actions do have many similarities with the Soviet phenomenon of *blat*, described in chapter one. They used their personal networks to obtain a 'scarce' good, i.e. quality and non-time consuming healthcare. This is analogous to what Ledeneva writes of Soviet style *blat*: "Acquaintance with a [doctor] meant receiving additional attention and extra quality of service and avoiding queues" (Ledeneva 1998:133).

Further, even though the doctors were not part of my informants' own personal networks, they were connected through common friends. This is also compatible with an analysis of these actions as *blat*. Ledeneva points out that *blat* favours were often provided through intermediates:

With friends, mediation occurred more or less routinely. Friends were always asked first, and if they could not help directly they transferred the request so that help could be eventually provided by some donor. In the latter case the recipient had to pay, or give some present, but it was reliable and effective (*ibid*:158).

Moreover, as this quote shows, even the immediate payment of money that my informants gave or tried to give does not contradict such an analysis. This is best seen in Nadia's case, where the doctor regarded her as a friend, and therefore would not take her money. This fact can further be illuminated by pointing to the qualitative social relationships found in gift-exchange. Marshall Sahlins (1988:196) uses the conception of kinship distance, i.e. gift-exchange tends to be between people who are closely related, while commodity exchange tends to pervade at the outskirts of the personal network. A similar point is made by Wojciech Pawlik (1992), in a study of informal economy in socialist Poland:

The further the ties outward from the *środowisko* [group of 'ours' ('*swoi*')], the more the principle of profitability applies, or at least an equivalence of mutual returns. A continuum of symbolic to material rewards, and of altruism, to reciprocity to profit, parallels the continuum of exchange relations from the family to 'others' (*ibid*:93).

Roman, Nadia and Lesya did not use the term *blat* to describe their actions. Nadia rather called it *po-znajomstvo* (by acquaintance), a term she said is interchangeable with *blat*, but not so negatively loaded. There seems to be, however, an aspect of what Ledeneva calls 'misrecognition' in my informants' conceptualisation of their own actions. While they regarded their own actions as something quite normal and moral, my informants often expressed dissatisfaction and annoyance with being passed in line at public offices, by people who are 'led' by an employee. Their own actions were thus regarded as moral, while the same kind of actions which went in others' favour was seen as unmoral.

There thus seems to be a continuance of *blat* favours in the everyday lives of my informants. This is supported by the findings of Grødeland, Miller and Koschenhkina (1998): "...in Ukraine people said to be more willing to act as contacts nowadays than they were during the communist regime" (*ibid*:671). Another indication showing this is that 79% of the respondents in a survey said they had found their current job through friends, acquaintances or relatives (Kyiv Post 2004b). Such a conclusion on Soviet legacies is reached by Wedel (1992) as well,

The problem-solving networks joining community to the state economy and bureaucracy, especially viable during the shortage-ridden 1980s, have not dissolved. Change will entail more than eliminating shortage or introducing 'bureaucratic rationality': people accustomed to turning to their friends and acquaintances for help are not inclined to operate otherwise, even when 'otherwise' becomes theoretically possible (*ibid*:76).

And, contrary to what Borén and Sedlieniks claim, *blat* favours nowadays do not only figure in new areas such as business and finance. It is still important in areas that were ingrained with *blat* in Soviet times, such as the health service. This claim is supported by Ledeneva (1998) as well:

Surgical operations at the best medical centres were, and still are, organised by *blat*... Doctors were important people with whom to cultivate relationships because, in addition to providing access to hospital beds, *blat* with the doctor could sometimes make the difference between whether he or she listened seriously to the patient and gave a good diagnosis during a visit or only dealt with the matter perfunctorily (*ibid*:29-30).

I will further claim that the mentality of arranging things by searching for personal links can be found in other situations as well, more specifically, in situations where such links are missing and therefore sought to be created. This will be exemplified in *Case III: Fixing the Central Heating*.

The troublesome acts of giving and receiving

Roman's and Lesya's transfers to the doctors were both done discreetly.³² Lesya even described her transfer in terms of a theatrical play where the two actors involved, the giver and the receiver, set up an act where the giver pretended she was not really giving, and the receiver pretended he was not receiving. What is the rationale behind such as behaviour?

One explanation for discreet transfers is that they are felt to be immoral by those involved, since morality and visibility often stick together. As noted above, however, neither Roman nor Lesya regarded their actions as illegitimate or immoral, and the transfers were rather described as acts of gratitude. If we compare these cases with more ritualised occasions of gift-giving, we can see that such discreet transfers might be part of a more general attitude towards giving and receiving; an attitude that can best be described as troublesome. One clue to this troublesome act of, in this case, receiving was described in the previous chapter, when Roman did not open any of the presents he was given at his birthday in the presence of the givers. The way Roman acted at his birthday party was a special case, however, since at all other birthday parties I attended, presents were opened in the presence of the givers.

Gift-giving at weddings cannot be regarded as special cases. During the fieldwork I was invited to two weddings, one in the countryside and one in the city. The son of Roman's cousin was to be married in the village where Roman's parents live. Roman told me to buy a bottle of *horilka* and put \$20 in an envelope. In the car he showed me how to hand over the gift. He placed the envelope round the bottle, and then put the bottle in his left hand, so that the envelope was hidden in his hand. I was told to greet the host, the father of the groom, and give him the bottle discreetly. So I did, and so did every adult male participant.

The second wedding I attended was held in the city, when a friend of my wife was to be married. The gift-giving ritual was almost identical, except that instead of a bottle of *horilka*, we brought flowers. My wife put \$40 in an envelope, and told me to slip it discreetly into the groom's hand when I greeted him. He thanked me, and put the unopened envelope in the inside pocket of his jacket. My wife gave the flowers to the bride.

This way of giving gifts discreetly at weddings seems to be sort of a norm, which can be seen in another example where the opposite, giving wedding gifts openly, was negatively valued. Sitting in Nadia and Roman's kitchen together with Maria, she told us about a wedding she had been to recently. At this wedding gift-money was openly put on a tablecloth, without any envelope. Roman and Nadia expressed astonishment over this. Maria described how the groom came from a wealthy family, and had wealth friends, while the bride's family did not seem to be so well-off, and she characterised them as being from the *selo* (countryside).

It was terrible. Everybody took out their wallets and started to count money. First, the mother of the bride gave \$500. But the terrible thing was that the groom's family and friends coughed up \$200 each, while the bride's family did not have such money.

The terrible thing was that differences in wealth were displayed by giving openly. This evidently caused embarrassment for those who could not give as much as others. Maria explained the gift-giving practice by saying that the groom came from another part of Ukraine, and therefore probably had 'another tradition' of holding weddings.

The negative valuation of the gift-giving procedure witnessed by Maria becomes even more understandable if we look at it in a context of the Soviet past.³³ First of all, central to the communist ideology was a concept of *equality* for all. As already noted, giving in public sometimes involves a display of *inequality*. Further, as Elisabeth L. Fürst (2004) asserts, money was regarded as something dirty in the Soviet ideology, since it was associated with Western capitalism and bourgeois ideology. If such Soviet ideas and values were to some degree internalised, it could be possible that giving money in public feels unnatural to my informants. This might explain why the giving of money at the two weddings which I attended was done in the most discrete manner, and why the 'collection' of money at the wedding attended by Maria was negatively valued. There

is an obvious problem with such an explanation, however. The groom's family in the wedding Maria attended did not have a 'tradition' for giving discreetly, even though they also lived in the Soviet Union.

Another, and perhaps more speculative, explanation might be connected to the ideological exaltation of public property and elimination of private property. Private property was, as money, regarded as something bourgeois, and therefore dirty. David Cheal (1988) shows how private property is a precondition for gift-giving in modern societies. To give a gift is to transfer ownership of an object, so the giver must necessarily have possession of an object to renounce ownership of it. If the social norm is shared ownership of property, there is nothing to give away, since no one can claim exclusive right to public objects. Cheal gives an example from a study of a Christian sect in Canada whose members live communally, and collectively own most goods and means of production. Extensive gift giving has not existed in this sect until recently, as a consequence of the acquiring of private incomes by some of its individuals. Cheal thus concludes that,

For a gift transaction to take place it is necessary for the donor to have the exclusive right to freely dispose of some object. Exclusive rights (i.e. rights of exclusion) are contrary to all communal forms of property holding. They are therefore a fundamental historical precondition for the emergence of differentiated gift economies (*ibid*:11).

This is analogous with what was noted on the difficulties of using the term 'theft' in socialist societies. When there is no private property, objects in public possession can neither be given away nor stolen.

Extensive gift-giving would therefore contradict the official ideology of public property. Further, gift-giving also contradicted the state ideology of atheism, since it is often related to religious celebrations. One informant gave an example of how gifts given to children on St. Nicholas Day³⁴ were supposed to be hidden:

I remember how all the pupils in my class used to take with them to school the presents they had been given at St. Nicholas Day. The whole school would smell of oranges and chocolates. One St. Nicholas Day my parents noticed that I packed the presents in my bag, and started yelling at me because a teacher could see it and report us for celebrating a religious day.

7 Case III: Fixing the central heating

The previous case showed how some of my informants used their personal networks in everyday encounters with public services. I argued that this can be regarded as a continuance of the Soviet institution of *blat*. This next case shows what can be done if the link to a public service is lacking, i.e. how my informants *personalise* relations with strangers by giving gifts.

Roman and Nadia's apartment is heated by a central heating system, run and maintained by a communal office called ZhEK. The heating is switched on 15 October, and switched off 15 of April. During winter temperatures can fall to 25 degrees below zero, so the central heating is a necessity. Occasional power failures which are quite common during the winter can leave the radiators cold for hours and days, which is not very pleasant for the inhabitants. Sometimes the radiators stops warming up completely; this is most often caused by too much air in the system or that they are clogged up. This happened to the radiator in Roman and Nadia's bedroom. It just did not heat, and when the outdoor temperature started to drop, the bedroom was almost impossible to use.

Nadia therefore went to the ZhEK to write a complaint, so that it could be fixed. Some days later two men from the office came to the apartment, looked at the radiator in question, confirmed that it was not working, and left saying there was nothing they could do about it.

Roman told me that if they did not contact the head engineer, the problem would probably not be solved until next summer. But since they did not know anyone who worked in that office, or anyone that knew someone who did, they decided to buy the head engineer a bottle of cognac. I went with Roman to one of the numerous *alkomarkets* (shops that only sell alcohol), and after some consideration he chose a rather exclusive imported cognac that came in rather decorous packaging. He put the cognac in a black plastic bag, and the next day Nadia went to the head engineer. She told me he was just on his way out, and she had introduced herself and the problem with the radiator. He said he would look into the case. She then placed the plastic bag on his desk, saying it

was 'something for the coffee'. The head engineer tried to refuse, but Nadia insisted, and he said he would do his best, but could not promise anything. "Now he will remember us when he takes a nip of the cognac with his coffee", said Roman, quite hopeful of a good outcome for the problem.

After some days three men came and installed valves in all the radiators, so as to remove the air. Roman gave them 20 hryvny for the work. This did not make any difference, however; the radiator was still cold. Roman and Nadia were told that the problem was probably located in the main tube, and that it could not be fixed until spring when the central heating would be switched off.

The personalisation of relations

In this case we see how Roman clearly expressed that public employees are not to be trusted to do an adequate job, and therefore decided to give the head engineer an expensive bottle of cognac. The price of the cognac was about \$10, i.e. equivalent to the sums that Roman and Lesya gave to the doctors they consulted.

How can we compare this case with the extended case involving Roman, Nadia and Lesya? As in the previous case, the reason for the transfer was to 'speed things up' and get it done properly. Further, the transfer was made before the service was completed, and the transfer was done discreetly and without any prior agreement as to its size. The contents of the plastic bag were not examined, with Nadia saying it was something to consume, exactly the same as what Roman told the cardiologist when he gave her the box of chocolates. Exactly what and how much it cost were not discussed. In contrast to the doctors in Roman's and Lesya's cases, who did not resist the transfers, the head engineer did not want to take the plastic bag at all.

I will argue, however, that the transfer made in this last case is quite different from the transfers in the previous case. First of all, there is the obvious fact of the different quality of the objects transferred, i.e. a bottle of cognac as opposed to money. Further, whereas the actors in the previous case regarded their giving as acts of gratitude or payment for a service, Roman and Nadia did not know what would be the outcome of giving cognac to the head engineer. In other words, whereas the executions of the

services in the previous case were already agreed upon when the transfers took place, Nadia gave the bottle of cognac without knowing whether any execution of any service whatsoever would result from it. This point is important, because alcohol is sometimes also used as a direct means of payment, especially in the countryside.³⁵ I will argue, however, that the bottle of cognac given in this specific case was not a form of payment, nor a sign of gratitude, but rather an effort to *personalise relations* with the head engineer, and thereby be treated more as a sort of *svoi* than as a *chuzhyj*. Whereas a relationship of *svoi*, or quasi-*svoi* if you prefer, had already been established *before* the transactions took place in *Case II* by finding a necessary personal link, such a relationship had to be *created* in this last case. This was done by forcing a reciprocal debt on the head engineer. So, while the transfers in the previous case were more of an unofficial payment for a service, the transfer in this last case can be regarded as a *gift*.

The bottle of cognac thus has some common features with what Ledeneva calls a *blat* gift (Ledeneva 1998:153-4). *Blat* gifts are symbolic tokens of gratitude and appreciation given to *blat* connections to create a benevolent attitude: "For the most part, *blat* gifts were redundant transactions used for the construction of small social worlds" (*ibid*:153). Such *blat* gifts could be French perfume for women and a good cognac for men. The box of chocolates would not be regarded as a *blat* gift, however, since flowers and chocolates "did not count" (*ibid*:154).

Referring to this last transfer as a gift needs to be explained, since it is not an obvious case of gift-giving. As Pierre Bourdieu (1996) points out, the essential feature of gift-giving is the time lag between the presentation of the gift and the return gift, which disguises the objective obligation involved. In our case, Nadia did present the black plastic bag and its contents as a gift. However, the intention behind it was most likely clear to both the giver and the receiver, even though neither explicitly says so. Nadia wanted to have the central heating fixed as soon as possible, and the head engineer tried to refuse the gift, maybe because he could not promise a satisfactory return favour. The situation did thus reveal that this was far from an altruistic gift, and the return was implicitly understood to be personal attention in fixing the central heating in Roman and Nadia's apartment. The objective obligation to return a gift that Bourdieu claims is

camouflaged by the time lag was thus, most likely, subjectively understood by both giver and receiver.

Even though the time lag between the presentation and the return was relatively short, and the intention of the transfer was implicit, I still call this transfer a gift. First of all, as Cheal (1988) has shown in an analysis of Christmas gift-giving in Canada, there does not have to be a time lag or a spatial separation of the presentation and return in gift transactions. He concludes that the “pattern of Christmas giving in the Anglo-American societies appears to contradict Bourdieu’s exchange thesis, and his elegant model of interpersonal transactions is not likely to provide the most useful basis for understanding modern gift economies” (*ibid*:22).

Further, the characteristics of a gift-exchange become clearer if we try to analyse this transfer as *market exchange* or *barter*, the latter being an exchange of objects without the use of money (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992). Market exchange and barter are transactions carried out between free and equal agents, who are willing to sacrifice something they have to gain something that the other possesses. In our case, the value of the bottle of cognac was never mentioned; in fact, the contents of the plastic bag was not even described or taken out to be evaluated. Thus, the head engineer did not take part in any bargaining, and he was not acting as a free agent, in the sense that he could not pull out of the transfer, even if he had tried to. Secondly, and more importantly, there was no explicit deal agreed upon that the cognac was to be payment for a service. The link between the bottle of cognac and the service was implicit, but not confirmed. Even though Nadia wanted something from the head engineer, there was no bargaining taking place and no agreement reached.

If we use Gregory’s model for gifts and commodities, or Gell’s objection for that matter, we see from Roman’s statement that the gift, or the identity of himself and Nadia, were intended to be inalienable, since the head engineer would remember them ‘when he takes a nip of the cognac’. In this respect the transfer could be seen as a gift-exchange. However, since the transactors were aliens, their social distance should imply that this transfer actually was a commodity-exchange. But here is my point: *a gift was given to a person who was alien (chuzhyj) to personalise relations with him, that is, shorten the*

social distance, and thereby make him more of a non-alien (svoi). As Marshall Sahlins (1988) puts it: “If friends make gifts, gifts make friends” (*ibid*:186).

The gift, far from being altruistic, was used instrumentally to make a connection, and thereby to achieve something. It was thus an attack on the receiver’s freedom by creating a debtor (Bourdieu 1996:80). If we use Blau’s (1968) model of social exchange, Nadia and Roman created a social obligation in order to achieve something. By insisting on giving the head engineer a bottle of cognac, Nadia forced him into a personal debt with them. But whereas Blau claims that social exchange creates diffuse future obligations, in which “the nature of the return is invariably not stipulated in advance, cannot be bargained about, and must be left to the discretion of the one who makes it” (*ibid*:454), the return in our case was as argued implicitly understood by both parties. The head engineer clearly tried to slip away from the compelling embrace of reciprocity, and moderated his return-‘gift’ by saying he could not promise anything. He might have been aware that this was a problem he could not fix, which would have placed him in a tricky situation, since he would not be able reciprocate the gift.

Why did Roman and Nadia not just give the head engineer \$10 as they did or tried to do in their consultations with the cardiologist? The value of the cognac was about the same, so why go to the trouble of buying a gift? Roman said he never considered giving money instead of the cognac. It would have been inappropriate, he told me. Why would it have been inappropriate? Why was it more appropriate to give money to the cardiologist?

I think the inappropriateness of giving money in this last case is connected to a fact already mentioned. In the former cases, a ‘deal’ had already been settled *before* the transfer was made, through the mediation of a common personal link, whereas in the latter case the aim was to get the very ‘deal’ in place. The bottle of cognac was therefore a substitute for the personal links used in the former cases. Whereas the \$10 to the cardiologist was a *payment for a service*, or an immediate settlement of a reciprocal debt, the bottle of cognac to the head engineer was an invitation into a quasi-personal relationship, where the reciprocal settlement would be personal attention from the head engineer, ensuring that a service would be satisfactorily carried out. Roman’s statement that money would have been inappropriate must therefore be seen in a context that the

transfer was not any payment for a service, but rather an invitation to an execution of a service with a personal touch.

Further, there is the fact that money as a gift is quite impersonal, and probably not very effective in creating personal relationships. As James G. Carrier (1995) puts it,

The use of money as gift is intriguing, because people usually see it as anonymous. It is almost impossible to identify money with the transactor or give it a social history, so that it appears to be indifferent to the social relationship on which it is given (*ibid*:59).

Just as my informants' use of personal networks in *Case II* can be understood in a context of Soviet practices, so can this practice of personalising relations. Janine Wedel (1992) thus describes how personalisation of relations in socialist Poland was important in dealing with the bureaucracy:

Success in dealing with the state bureaucracy and economy depended on the ability to personalize matters and to impart an informal quality to one's relationship with the licensing bureau or the gasoline station attendant. ... Private arrangements provide a way through the maze of Polish bureaucracy (*ibid*:3; 38).

Personalisation of relations by giving alcohol

A bottle of cognac as a gift to create a relationship is not incidental. It is what I will call an *exceptionally inalienable gift*, since the giver's identity not only clings onto the given object, but is also 'consumed' in the gulp. I do not mean 'consumed' in a metaphorical 'the wine is the blood'-sense, but rather in a more mundane and dull sense of use-value. Objects that have a use-value make exceptionally inalienable gifts, because they are often and actively 'consumed', rather than being stuffed away in the garage, and therefore more successful in reminding the receiver of who gave it. Nadia and Roman thereby forced the head engineer into a reciprocal debt which meant that they would 'haunt' him every time he fancied some of the precious drops.

A bottle of cognac makes an exceptionally inalienable gift in another sense as well, by having a strong symbolic value, more specifically of sociability and friendship. Whereas an exclusive stapler or a box of folders, both indispensable to any diligent bureaucrat, would please the professional role of an official, a bottle of alcohol pleases the private role of that same official.

As described in chapter five, alcohol has a central place in Ukrainian social life. The act of social drinking marks the boundary of *svoi* and *chuzhyj* symbolically, since a person drinks with his or her friends. By giving the head engineer a bottle of cognac, in contrast to a stapler, the personal aspect of the gift was thus emphasised. As already noted, alcohol is consumed at home, in one's leisure time, preferably in the company of good friends. The symbolic value of this specific gift was that it delighted the personal role rather than the professional role of the head engineer. He was therefore pulled out of his official and 'front region' role as a state employee and into a personal and 'backstage' relation with Nadia and Roman. This was done in a discreet manner so that the head engineer would not be offended. Erving Goffman (1959) calls this 'putting out feelers':

In many kinds of social interaction, unofficial communication provides a way in which one team can extend a definite but noncompromising invitation to the other, *requesting that social distance and formality be increased or decreased*, or that both teams shift the interaction to one involving the performance of a new set of roles (*ibid*:188; my emphasis).

The head engineer tried to stay in the 'front region' by rejecting the gift, but Nadia's persistence forced him into accepting her definition of the situation as 'backstage'. He was now responsible for fixing the central heating not only according to his professional duties, but also had a personal obligation to help out. Janine Wedel (1986) argues along the same line when it comes to alcohol: "Vodka facilitates the transformation from an official to an unofficial situation. ... Vodka promotes the privatization of public roles" (*ibid*:29).

Allan Silver's (1997) assertion that the personal domain of modernity is contradictory to, and at the same time dependent on an impersonal bureaucracy, and that the "impersonal institutions define the public world" (*ibid*:47), does not seem to cover the picture as represented in this last case. Quasi-personal relations can be created in meetings between bureaucrat and citizen, where values of the personal sphere, such as friendship and generosity, are transferred into the public sphere of bureaucracy by the act of gift-giving. In our case by giving alcohol, a kind of gift which even on a symbolic level underlines the private dimension. The impersonal bureaucracy is thus not so impersonal as Silver claims after all.

Garcelon's model seems to fit more, since he regards interaction in the social realm as containing both formal and informal aspect. Bureaucrats are people, having their own personal networks, enjoying a glass of cognac in the company of good friends, and not just programmed robots carrying out their public duties. The line between the public and the private, or the almost coinciding line between the formal and the informal, is therefore not absolute. Several studies in recent years have likewise showed the interconnectedness of such dichotomies (Lomnitz 1988; Harding and Jenkins 1989; Wedel 1986; 1992; Firlit and Chłopecki 1992; Gupta 1995; Ledeneva 1998; Ulfesnes 1999; Sissener 2001). I therefore do not agree with James Scott's (1998) assertion that officials of modern states are "of necessity, at least one step – and often several steps – removed from the society they are charged with governing" (*ibid*:76). If we view the public/private distinction according to Goffman's interactional model, we are able to see how an official can move between the public sphere of official duties and a private sphere of personal obligations without compromising either too much.

8 Case IV: Making a passport

One Tuesday morning I was at Roman's stall, drinking tea and watching the busy crowd walking by like a slow flowing river, when Roman got a call from a relative, Losha, who lives in a small town not far from Lviv. Losha, a former engineer in a state factory, but now unemployed for the third year, had been offered a job in Portugal. He had a friend working illegally in Portugal who could arrange him a job. He had found a travel agency that offered a bus tour to Portugal, including a tourist visa, leaving in one month. The problem was that he did not have a valid passport, and therefore needed to get one in a short time. The official procedure for getting a passport takes about two and a half months at a normal fee, or two weeks if you pay double. Losha could not wait two weeks, since it takes at least three week for the travel agency to get a visa.

Roman decided to close his stall and meet Losha to help him out. We met him outside the passport office downtown, and he shook hands first with Roman and then with me. Roman told him I was a student from Norway, investigating how Ukrainians survive on such low wages. Losha smiled, showing a glimmering gold tooth: "This is how we survive. We go abroad and work for *kopijky* [pennies]".

Losha told us that he had got all the necessary documents in the town where he lived. An acquaintance in the local city council had helped him with that. But the passport could only be made in Lviv, and being from another town, he did not know anyone who could help him. So he mobilised all relatives and friends that might know someone in the passport office. He was constantly talking on the mobile phone, searching his network for possible links. His cousin called someone he though might know someone. A former colleague and close friend called a friend that had made a passport 'without queuing' himself. Roman called Maksym, who had made a lot of useful contacts when he worked in the bazaar administration. The necessary link was his own sister, however, who lives in Lviv, and who has a friend who used to study with one of the employees at the passport office. His sister came down to the office, and they both went inside.

When they came out again, Losha looked relieved, and I understood that he had managed to arrange some kind of deal. He told us that his sister had introduced herself as 'a friend of Yulia' to the officer she thought was the right one, and the officer had taken her out in the corridor. There she had arranged for Losha to get a passport the next day. Losha said it cost him 250 hryvny in official fees, and an additional \$80 for the 'personal' service.

Back at the bazaar, I asked Roman why Losha could not just have gone in and said he wanted to pay extra 'under the table', without going through the trouble of finding some kind of link first. He explained that you cannot give *khabar* (bribe) to just anyone, because they are afraid of accepting them. "Who knows if I have the police 'behind my back', just waiting to catch a bribe-taker?"

Blat, gifts and bribes

If we compare this case with *Case II*, we see some obvious similarities. The most prominent feature in both cases is the search for a personal link to a public service. The actors introduced themselves as being 'from that common friend', and thereby got immediate access to a service they would otherwise have to queue for. All the actors were entitled to the service they received, but they paid, or tried to pay, additional 'fees'. The transfer of money also took place 'backstage', when the actors were alone with the officials. Roman thus waited until the nurse had left the office before he placed the plastic bag on the doctor's desk. The official at the passport office had taken Losha's sister out in the corridor before money changed hands. All the transfers, except Nadia's failed transfer, were given *before* the actual service had been completed.

In the latter case, however, Roman explicitly called the money transferred for a bribe, while he referred to the money he had given the doctor as gratitude. Further, the actors going to the doctors did not ask and were not told exactly how much they had to pay for the service. Instead, they asked their friends how much these doctors are given generally, and when they gave them the money, the doctors did not check how much had been given. In the case at the passport office, the official herself told Losha's sister

how much the service would cost. Lastly, the sums transferred were quite different; the doctors were given about \$10, while the official at the passport office requested \$80.

If we use the 'anthropological perspective' discussed in chapter one, then the acts in *Cases II* and *III* should not be called corruption, since they were not regarded as being illegitimate by the actors themselves. This last case is trickier to place in a corruption/non-corruption distinction based on 'the native's point of view', since Roman called the act corrupt, but did not see it as illegitimate. He even tried to help by trying to find a link in his own network.

I will give four possible explanations as to why Roman simultaneously viewed this transfer corrupt and not illegitimate. First, it might be linked to a methodological problem. We had talked a lot about corruption before this event, and Roman might have called it corruption just because he knew it was a subject I was interested in. His comment that officials are afraid of being caught by the police shows, however, that he probably did regard this act as corrupt. I think a more plausible explanation might therefore be found in the public discourse on corruption. When corruption is mentioned in newspapers and on television it mainly involves two features; the problem of delimiting which acts are corrupt and which are not, and stories of corruption on the highest levels of society (see next chapter).

The problem of delimiting corruption in public discourse means that similar acts are valued differently within the same society. The difficulty of defining corruption is thus not only an academic headache. Roman could therefore have referred to the act at the passport office as corrupt according to a definition of corruption found in public discourse, and not necessarily according to his own definition of legitimate acts. Even though he recognised it as corruption, he might thus have misrecognised the legitimacy of it. The point is that he might have used the word emptied of all negative connotations often attached to it. This is possible because there is no accepted and universal definition of it found in the public discourse. On the contrary, as will be shown in the next chapter, news articles often express quite contradictory definitions.

Another possible explanation, also connected to a feature in public discourse, is that Roman did regard the act as corrupt *and* illegitimate, but found legitimacy in the fact that 'everybody does it', politicians included. When we discussed corruption in general,

Roman would always mention cases of corruption on high levels in the society, among politicians and wealthy businessmen, which he valued negatively. He used this to legitimate lower-level corruption by saying things like: “The fish rots from the head” or “Kuchma [the former president] steals, so why can’t I”. The fact that ‘the head is rotten’ is therefore used to legitimise one’s own acts. As Mykola Knyazhyts’kyi (2004) puts it in a Lviv newspaper, “we live in a country of double standards. If an official takes bribes (*khabar*), steal, then the ordinary person asks himself: why can he, and not I?”

A fourth explanation, and maybe the most simple, is that Roman viewed the *official’s* act as corrupt, and not necessarily Losha’s. As will be shown in the next chapter, the moral responsibility seems to be at the side of the receiver. The fact that the official operated with a fixed ‘rate’ for making a passport outside the queue, indicate that this was not a unique case. The legitimacy therefore lies in the acknowledgement that the official would have taken those money from someone else anyway.

9 *Khabar* in Public Discourse

The Ukrainian word for bribe is '*khabar*' (хабар), while the term for corruption is '*koruptsia*' (корупція). The etymological origin of the word *khabar* seems to be the Turkish word '*xabär*', meaning 'message'. From this original meaning the word has had a semantic shift to 'money given to a messenger' and then to 'bribe' (Vasmer 1973). The term '*khabar*' was used in a written document in Lviv as early as 1587, in a charter on pedagogics by the Uspenskyj Brotherhood, a Ukrainian movement of intellectuals: "The teacher (...) must be devout, clever, modest, no drunkard, no bribe-taker [*khabarnykom*]..." (Kos and Fedyna 1996:25).

The dictionary meaning of *khabar* is a "presentation in the form of money or valuable objects to an official person for certain services, slackening, allotment of privileges and so on" (Oleksiyenko and Shumejlo 2003). The moral responsibility seems to be put on the receiver's shoulders, as is seen in the derivatives '*khabarnyk*' and '*khabarnytsya*', which are masculine and feminine nouns meaning a person who *receives* a bribe (*Slovnnyk Ukraïns'koi movy* 1980). This is also seen in the Ukrainian criminal code, which states that a bribe-taker can face up to twelve years in prison, while the maximum penalty for a bribe-giver is eight years.³⁶

The public discourse on corruption and bribing indicate that it is regarded as a large problem in the Ukrainian society. President Yushchenko even said in parliament that corruption is the main problem in contemporary Ukraine (VR 2005). One of the reasons for Yushchenko gaining such huge support in the 2004 Presidential elections was thus his promise to fight corruption. In view of this, the 'Orange Revolution', mentioned in chapter three, was mainly a popular uprising against the corrupt authorities under Leonid Kuchma's rule (see illustration 14; p.93). In the aftermath of the revolution, corruption has become sort of a mantra in the mass media, and stories on corruption and corrupt officials 'caught in the act' flourish. For instance, an edition of the newspaper *Vechirni Visti* contained two articles on corruption and bribing; in the two articles the word '*khabar*' is mentioned nine times, while the word '*koruptsiya*' is mentioned thirteen times (VV 2005).

When corruption is mentioned in the mass media it often involves high-ranking officials caught or suspected of corrupt acts. One of the articles in *Vechirni Visti* thus reports how several persons, closely connected to parliamentary deputies, were caught trying to give \$50,000 to a member of the government. It has therefore been important for President Yushchenko to distance himself and his government from such corrupt acts, as he did in a speech to parliament:

...in this country problem number one is corruption, and it starts from the head. I will not take *khavar*, I will not steal, and I will demand the same from the government... I want to say, friends, that the government will not only refrain from stealing, the government will not take *khavar*. ... I want to certify, that transparency and openness will be characteristics of my government's work. Decisions will be taken exclusively in meeting rooms, and not in places for recreation (VR 2005).

In a critical answer to Yushchenko's fight against corruption, Il'ko Lemko (2005a), a local columnist, wrote in a Lviv newspaper that when the President promised his government and local authorities would not steal,

I already had my doubts and my brain was obsessively tortured by the question: how is it that the newly appointed government and local officials suddenly will not steal, when they have always stolen, stolen genetically, stolen if not in the course of a millennium, so at least the last century? Everybody steals, because it takes ages for a nation to build up moral principles, and only year and days to lose them in times of misfortune, devastation, famine, bloodshed and atheism... We now live in a society where literally everyone if not stole micro schemes from '*Elektron*', sweets from '*Svitoch*' or milk from the *kolkhoz* farm, then gave *khavar* to doctors, teachers, police officers or at least received unofficial wages 'in an envelope', which also is in fact a dishonest act. ... A person, who got used to stealing, will be stealing forever... (*ibid*).

Such a pessimistic view can be contrasted with an article by Nataliya Tymoshenko (2002) published in the Ukrainian journal *Politika i Kultura*, where she starts this way:

According to a recent sociological survey, medical healthcare is not far from being proclaimed the most corrupt sphere in Ukraine. ... every second Ukrainian admitted that he or she 'gave *khavar*' to doctors for free medical aid. ... The other half is, in my opinion, just ungrateful pigs (*ibid*:29).

Whereas Lemko places such different acts as stealing, giving *khavar* and receiving unofficial wages in one sack which he names 'dishonest acts', Tymoshenko rather argues for a moral differentiation of 'corrupt' acts. She thus continues:

First of all it is necessary to determine, what exactly can be called manifestations of corruption, and what is mere human gratitude, which does not have any relation to 'full-fledge' corruption what so ever, even though every attempt is made to classify it as such. For example, when a Supreme Court judge offers \$500.000 for one vote in support of a certain candidate to the post as head judge, that is corruption. When a considerable amount of money is offered to a public prosecutor to make him refuse in one way or another to proceed with a plaintiff's case, that is absolutely corruption. When you put 10 hryvny inside your licence before you give it to an officer of the road police,

in order to avoid a fine, that is also a manifestation of bribing on a small scale. But when you give a plumber five hryvny or a bottle [of *horilka*] as he is leaving after fixing your sewer pipes all night long (even if he does not demand it, you just have to give, because that is the human thing to do), or give flowers, sweets and a porcelain teapot to your doctor as you are leaving the hospital, that, pardon me, are appropriate manifestations of ordinary human gratitude of absolutely similar nature. The only difference is that you value your sewerage to five hryvny and your health somewhat more dearly. ... Material gratitude to doctors is a perpetual phenomenon. It was, is, and will be (*ibid*:30).

The central question is where the line between corrupt and non-corrupt acts should be drawn. Tymoshenko argues that gratitude must be regarded as morally good, and even required. She writes: "By the way, you can decide not to pay; that is your business. And your moral-ethical problem" (*ibid*). When separating corruption from gratitude, she points out that transfers to an official in order to *change* that official's course of actions should be regarded as corruption, while gratitude is more a sign of appreciation for a service rendered. She also uses words that underline the difference in timing: signs of gratitude are given *after* the service is completed; 'as the plumber is leaving' and 'as you are leaving the hospital'. Corrupt transfers are, by contrast, given *beforehand*, to influence an outcome; the court judge offers money in advance and money is put in the licence before handing it over. Such criteria for separating gratitude from corruption are used in academic writings as well (Miller *et al.* 2001:149-56).

The difficulty of drawing such a line is seen in other public discussions as well. For instance, in an effort to prevent corruption in higher education, the Minister of Education and Science Vasyl H. Kremen' (2003) announced that it is necessary to "take effective measures concerning the non-tolerance of such negative phenomena as presents to lecturers from students in the form of flowers, sweets, souvenirs and so on during examination periods". Oleh Sydorenko, deputy head of the Interior Ministry department responsible for fighting economic crime, said in a Kyiv newspaper that such a move makes little sense, because "giving flowers and candies to a professor at an exam is an old tradition, and more a matter of decorating a table and creating a good atmosphere" (Kolesnyk 2004).

Even reports of cases that might be more obvious acts of corruption, at least according to a formalistic definition, contain hints to the problem of delimitation. A first-page story in a Lviv newspaper described how the city's head ecologist was arrested for taking \$150 in *khobar* from a local businessman. In the article it says that the businessman gave the head ecologist a 'gift' of money, a *khobar* 'of gratefulness', so as to avoid getting

a fine for breaking the law on ecology. Further, the journalist writes: "It is interesting that the sum received by the head ecologist turned out not to be so large, only \$150. Yet, as the Lviv police assured, *khavar* is *khavar*, and even such a 'ridiculous' sum does not dismiss the person who takes it from criminal responsibility" (Zel'man 2005). Likewise, in the article already referred to where attempts were made to bribe a member of the government, the journalist writes: "\$50,000 is obviously not much for a *khavar* at the 'level of Ministers'. ... Still, it cannot be excluded that this was, so to speak, only the first remittance" (VV 2005).

Problems of delimitating corruption are not only a characteristic of the public discourse, but were also evident when I asked my informants to define *khavar*. There was not any uniform or clear understanding of it, and most had difficulties in giving even a basic definition. For instance, one informant said: "It has something to do with money, and solving problems". Another informant refused to give any definition at all, and said it all depends on the situation. And when I gave different examples of situations similar to those described in *Cases II-IV*, there was far from any agreement in their interpretations. *Cases II* and *III* were in general not regarded as acts of corruption, while *Case IV* was called a corrupt act by most. That is, a corrupt act on behalf of the *official*, who misused her position to make some money. *Losha*, who initiated the deal by finding a necessary link, was not regarded as doing something terribly wrong. But opinions about these cases differed too much to give a clear-cut categorisation. This is further supported by the findings in a survey conducted by the Kyiv Institute of Sociology (UCIPR 1998): "The research showed that not all respondents can clearly formulate the meaning of the concept 'corruption'". 57% thus understood it as 'bribing [*khavarnytstvo*] of official persons and politic figures'; 54% as 'abuse of official authority'; 42% as 'cooperation between the authorities and criminal structures'; 40% as 'embezzlement of state and collective property'; 29% as 'swindling and dishonesty'; 19% as 'mutual agreements between officials'; and 10% as 'a means to overcome difficulties by solving personal problems with the help of an official'.

The problem of defining corruption does not mean, however, that people do not have an idea of when they are giving bribes. As another survey shows, almost half of the population in Lviv admitted giving bribes in the previous year (Narbut 2002).

A culture of corruption?

If we accept Il'ko Lemko's (2005a) rather pessimistic conclusion that a person who gets used to stealing will do so forever, and then put this together with his claim that everybody steals, the pressing question then becomes: "Who is to fight corruption in a corrupt society, in which supposedly there is no individual or institution free of it?" (Ledeneva 2001:39).³⁷ And, if we find an answer to this question, the next will be just as difficult: *How* can corruption be fought? Miller, Grødeland and Koshechkina (2001) argue that the answer to the last question depends on the cause of the corruption. If a 'culture of corruption' exists in a society, "in which citizens are happy to give bribes and officials are happy to accept them" (*ibid*:15), the prospects for ever fighting it seems bleak, unless the people themselves are 'reformed'. However, if people are acting corrupt because they are 'victims of circumstances', "in which neither citizens nor officials justify the practice, in which neither feels happy, in which both feel ashamed, but in which neither feels able to avoid the practice" (*ibid*), it should be enough to reform only the institutions.

Lemko's (2005a) point of view places him somewhere in-between a 'victim of circumstances'-model and a 'culture of corruption'-model. The circumstances he refers to are not poverty and low wages, but rather years of Soviet repression that destroyed basic moral values in the population. The lack of moral values has further led to a development of a 'culture of corruption', that will remain for a long time. In another article he writes

The task to subdue corruption, proclaimed by Yushchenko and Tymoshenko's government, is the most difficult task in the whole history of Ukraine, because in order to do this one needs to surmount year-long practices, which especially flourished in the last decades of the communist regime's ruling. The main remedy for dishonesty is strengthening moral principles. So, first moral, then economy. Moral valuables are quickly ruined, but take a very long time to set roots. So the only thing left for us to do is to bring up a new honest generation, to whom stealing will be worse than anything in the world. And until that generation has grown up, any remedy prescribed by parliamentarians and declarative statements directed to the surmounting of corruption will evidently be little effective (Lemko 2005b).

Nataliya Tymoshenko (2002) likewise asserts that some kind of 'culture of corruption' exists in the Ukraine, but whereas Lemko views this culture as a result of

Soviet repression, Tymoshenko views it as a form of a 'generous' national mentality. As she writes:

...the fight against corruption grows into a fight against our national mentality, against the 'generous' Slavic soul, against our nature, against our genes, against our blood. In one word, such a struggle is absolutely futile. Because the fight against oneself can only be successful under circumstances where there is some kind of inner strength. And if there is no such strength, there is a possibility of psychological disturbance, bifurcation of personality, numerous stresses and headaches. Because we are a weak nation, a nation without backbone, tending to be hysterical, infantile and readily willing to out of gratitude kiss the hand of the one who saves, helps, and shows the way. Not because we are slaves. But just because we got used to it (*ibid*:30).

The magic of corruption

The main characteristics of the public discourse on corruption are thus the difficulty of delimiting the phenomenon, and that it is a practice exercised by most people, deputies and Ministers included. The many reports on high-ranking officials charged with corruption fits with and strengthen the view held by most of my informants that corruption is most widespread at the higher levels of society. When Roman read such news stories while sitting at his stall at the bazaar, he would often say something like: "It's all mafia. Every one of them. They are all *zhydy*". As shown in chapter three, the 'state' and the 'mafia' are by many of my informants conceptualised as closely connected, with categories like *zhyd* and *moskal'* linking them. Whether or not every deputy is corrupt and a member of some 'mafia' is, of course, impossible to confirm, but I do not think it is very likely. It could thus be fruitful to use Klaus Sedlenieks' (2002) tentative comparison of Azande witchcraft and Latvians' notion of corruption. Sedlenieks argues that corruption for contemporary Latvians is, to a certain degree, what witchcraft is for the Azande, as described by E. E. Evans-Pritchard: "It is a concept, a mechanism and method for understanding, explaining, dealing with and also controlling the changing world. ...corruption is what explains not only misfortune, but also luck and a whole set of current situations" (*ibid*). As Katherine Verdery (1996) argues, the concept of the 'mafia' is likewise "a way of attributing difficult social problems to malevolent and unseen forces" (*ibid*:220). When officials are unable to explain their decisions or act in a manner that might rouse suspicion, magical words like 'corruption' and 'mafia' are easy to employ.

Conclusion

It is time to take a step back and provide some concluding remarks on what has been said. First of all, it is necessary to point out that the fieldwork for this thesis was too short and, more importantly, this student's level of experience in anthropological research is too low for any final conclusions. As pointed out in chapter two, I have presented only a few examples of how some of my informants act in certain situations. To draw any general or universal conclusions would thus be presumptuous.

Still, it is possible to summarise the main points. I have argued for the need to place an analysis of networking and personalisation of relations in contemporary Ukraine within a historical context of the Soviet system. Following Weintraub's (1997) advice, I have given an extensive description of the special features of the public/private distinction in Soviet Union, which was characterised by the omni-visible Soviet state as opposed to the invisible realm of personal networks. Suspicion towards the state and fellow citizens, as well as daily problems with obtaining scarce goods in an 'economy of shortage', resulted in an elevation of the 'inside' realm of *svoi*, as opposed to the dangerous 'outside', crowded with *chuzhyj* that report you to the KGB and stand before you in the queue for that last piece of meat. The circle of *svoi* thus meant mutual help, trust, generosity and the key to survival with some kind of dignity. The public realm meant the opposite. As Wedel (1986) writes from socialist Poland: "Humiliation is one of the features of almost any contact with the formal organs of the state. ... In order to accomplish any bureaucratic or official matter, one must wait, often being ignored, rudely treated and incorrectly directed to a series of other offices" (*ibid*:149-50). A similar observation is made by Aleksandr Zinoviev,

Bear in mind that when people spend their time in queues getting upset about the details of day-to-day life, their personalities are degraded. It isn't while standing in queues that great discoveries are made. It isn't while standing in queues that a sense of honour and human dignity grows stronger (Zinoviev 1974:283; in Ledeneva 1998:92).

When people needed services from an impersonal bureaucracy or goods that were difficult to obtain through formal channels, they would search their personal networks for some link, so as to avoid queuing and getting better quality service and goods. As

Ledeneva (1998) asserts, this 'economy of favours' made the Soviet system function, and thus became an important part of citizens' everyday life.

By describing the two categories of *svoi* and *chuzhyj*, I showed that such a distinction between public and private still exists in post-Soviet Ukraine. The general distrust in people one does not know was to some degree shared by all my informants. Further, as was shown in *Case II*, this distrust in strangers was also important when my informants were in need of public services, especially medical healthcare. Going to a doctor that is *svoi*, or at least more *svoi* than *chuzhyj*, guarantees better quality of the service. It also means that less time is spent, since one can 'jump the queue'. Even though money was transferred in two of the instances in *Case II*, I still analysed the informants' acts as having many similarities with the Soviet institution of *blat*.

Further, I expanded the conception of *blat* as also including what I call the personalisation of relations. When network links to some public office are missing, one can make a quasi-personal link by creating a reciprocal relation with an official. In *Case III* I showed how such a reciprocal relation was made by giving the official a bottle of cognac. I emphasised the importance of giving alcohol, since it symbolically underlines aspects of friendship and community. The official was thus taken from a professional front region to a personal backstage interaction. The rationale behind such behaviour is the same as that in *blat*; it can be found in my informants' distrust in public employees and public services in general, based to some extent on prior experience. By personalising relations with an official, the official does not only have a professional duty to render a service, but also a personal obligation. Likewise, Peter Preisendorfer (1995:265; referred in Lonkila 1997) argues that the individual has several strategies available to solve the problem of distrust. The example he gives is an interaction between a doctor and a patient, in which one of the strategies the patient can use is to personalise his or her relationship with the doctor, by common sailing-trips or golf-games. Transferring this to a Ukrainian reality, where sailing-trips and golf-games are not available options, giving a bottle of alcohol might be just as effective in creating a personal relationship.

As already noted, the concepts of networking and the personalisation of relations are based on a few observations and accounts of my informants' actions. It seems,

however, to be confirmed by a study of Miller, Grødeland and Koshechkina (2001:72), where 90% of the respondents in Ukraine answered that a person seeking a bureaucratic service he or she is entitled to would most likely approach the official through a contact to get a successful outcome. 91% said he or she would most likely offer a small present, while 81% also said that he or she would offer money or an expensive present. Although I have limited empirical data on such cases, these figures indicate that it is a much used way of coping with bureaucracy.

Networking and the personalisation of relations, as presented in *Cases II, III and IV*, balance on a thin line between legitimacy/illegitimacy and morality/immorality. Getting access to a public service by using one's personal relationships, and thereby 'jumping the queue', is questionable from a perspective of democratic values and bureaucratic professionalism. Such interactions between officials and citizens transcend the boundary between the public and the private, and therefore move in the fringes where ugly *Corruption* lurks. If we employ a formalistic definition of corruption, the acts in the cases will thus be categorised as corrupt, since the bureaucrats' actions "deviated from the *formal* duties of their public roles because of private-regarding wealth or status gains" (Scott 1972:4; referred in Ledeneva 1998:43). The bureaucrats prioritised private obligations or concerns instead of public duties. Public services, such as medical examinations, fixing the central heating or issuing a passport, are, according to democratic principles, distributed by queuing.³⁸ By mobilising network links, and personalising relations where such links did not exist, my informants jumped the queue, and got access to 'scarce goods' that were rather distributed according to social distance.

Subjectively, however, the acts were not valued as immoral or illegitimate. According to an 'anthropological perspective' on corruption, the acts in *Cases II* and *III* would not therefore be analysed as corrupt. *Case IV* is more difficult to categorise, since it was regarded as corrupt by at least one of the involved, but still viewed as legitimate. The 'anthropological perspective' is thus insufficient in explaining such instances. As was shown in the discussion on public discourse on corruption, there is no unambiguous 'native point of view' either in the press or in the population at large, but rather many different, and often contradictory, 'native points of view'. This might be connected to a 'game of misrecognition', where one's own actions are valued according

to different standards than are those of others'. It might also be connected to difficulties of placing different acts that were earlier described as *blat*, but which after the transition have taken on new and more monetary forms. As Sedlenieks (2003) and Barstad (2004) argue, practices that were earlier regarded as *blat* are now seen as corrupt, because of the introduction of money. Likewise, Fürst (2004) claims that when money, valued in Soviet ideology as something 'dirty', is introduced in relations of reciprocity, *blat* becomes morally equivocal and thus borders on corruption (*ibid*:189; 194). She poses a relevant question: "Can the reason why *blat* tends towards corruption be a blurring of gift and commodity, a hybrid of personal-near and impersonal-independent relations, of particularism and universalism?" (*ibid*:194). Barstad (2004) puts the question the other way around. She claims that the unclear boundary between gifts and bribes makes bribes more acceptable and moves them away from the category of corruption (*ibid*:34).

Efforts to delimitate gifts and bribes, *blat* and corruption are plentiful both in academia and in Ukrainian public discourse. When a theoretical perspective or a popular point of view has managed to capture the 'creature', it slips away before our eyes when lifted to a more general level. I therefore avoid going into such a battle of definitions and demarcations, and rather note that different acts seem to be valued according to context, personal perspective, degree of involvement, and so on. Such a point of view lies closer to an anthropological than to a formalistic perspective on corruption, since I mean corruption must be analysed in a cultural context. However, taking a cultural perspective also demands an acknowledgement of the fact that there are many 'natives' and just as many 'points of views'. We must also acknowledge that people 'misrecognise' their own actions. The main concern when you need medical healthcare, a new passport or to have your central heating fixed is not whether your actions can be defined as corrupt or not. If a call to a friend or a bottle of cognac gets the job done, any discourse on corruption seems quite irrelevant.

Illustration 1: *Picture from Virmens'ka street, downtown Lviv*



Illustration 3: *Picture of the opera house at Prospekt Svoboda*



Illustration 2: *Picture from downtown Lviv, St. Andrew's Church in the background*





Illustrations 4 and 5: *Four pictures from downtown Lviv. Above: Prospekt Svoboda. Below: Halytska street. The pictures to the left are from the 1930s; the pictures to the right were taken during the fieldwork*





Illustration 6: *Some vegetables sold at the sidewalk in May.
(Taken with permission from the seller)*

Illustration 7: *One of the many trams going on nine different routes.
Here from Rus'ka street downtown*





Illustration 8: *Marshrutkas picking up and discharging passengers at Prospekt Svoboda*

Illustration 9: *An abandoned factory building at Promylova street. This was once the building of Moldvinprom, a wine processing factory*





Illustration 10: *This picture is taken in the section where meat and vegetable are sold the bazaar. On the walls it says: “A strong economy makes a strong state. Svoe (своє) is best. Buy Ukrainian!”*

Illustration 11: *This picture shows the mixture of architectural styles. To the left a typical ‘Krushchovka’. Taken at Prospekt Svoboda*





Illustration 12: *A show window on Prospekt Svoboda, filled with both domestic and foreign alcohol*

Illustration 13: *As pointed out in chapter three, the ‘Orange Revolution’ was a success because the category of *svoi* was expanded to include fellow citizens as well. And the argument in chapter five was that alcohol is important in confirming bonds between *svoi*. These two aspects are mixed in this bottle of horilka. The label shows the slogan used in President Yushchenko’s election campaign, which decorated thousands of flags held by demonstrators shouting ‘Together we are many’*





Illustration 14: This advertisement was printed in a Lviv newspaper after the 'Orange Revolution' by a civil organisation called Samopomich (Self-help). It says: "Do you give khabar? Then you'll lose the victory!"

Notes

Introduction

1. Having over 2000 historical, architectural and cultural monuments, the city centre was included in UNESCO's World culture heritage list in 1998.
2. I will mainly write Ukrainian words in English transcription, and only use the Cyrillic alphabet where I find it necessary.
3. These historical facts are mostly taken from Subtelny (1994).
4. Except for the short-lived autonomous state formation of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic in 1918.
5. Korniyevskiy (2000) claims the real unemployment is closer to 7-8 million people.

Chapter I

6. Like Chris Hann, I will use the term 'post-socialism', and not 'post-communism'. "As far as the difference between 'socialism' and 'communism' is concerned, the former has generally been taken to refer to a more or less protracted transitional stage in progress towards the latter, the classless, ultimate destination of human societies. ... Most of the states ... claimed to be socialist rather than communist..." (Hann 1992:21; 2002:21).
7. Certain preconditions of Lewis' theory seem to exist in post-Soviet Ukraine; pre-welfare-state stage of capitalism, cash economy, persistently high rate of unemployment, low wages, failing social, political and economic organisation (Lewis 1966:21). There are, however, some fundamental discrepancies between Lewis' theory and the empirical reality in Ukraine. Lewis uses 'culture of poverty' to depict a *subculture* of poor minorities, reacting to their marginal position in a class-stratified society. Although some of my informants certainly are poor, both in subjective and objective measures, if it is possible to speak of classes in Ukraine at all, the dominant class would *officially* consist of poverty ridden people, barely making it above the subsistence line.
8. Miller, Grødeland and Koschekina (2001) criticise such a 'fading legacy'-model. They point out that "insofar as communism had a restraining rather than a motivating influence, insofar as it held citizens back against their will, then we might expect to find evidence of an 'inverse legacy' of communism – not the product of continuing communist domination of 'hearts and minds', not even the product of a 'fading legacy' of communism, so much as the product of a sudden end to communist restraint on behaviour" (*ibid*:20). Their 'escape from domination' model might be good to use when it comes to political values, but what I am looking at here is rather the continuity of informal practices, which in the first place were an opposition to the restraining formal system.
9. See Verdery 1996, Strayer 1998, and Scott 1998 for different analysis on the functioning and collapse of the Soviet Empire.
10. Verdery (1991:426; 1996:20) and Nielsen (1999) both claim the socialist states, far from being totalitarian, were rather weak. Verdery maintains this was a consequence of the structural flaws of the command economy.
11. This elevation of the 'inside' was also characteristic for religious activity during the Soviet Union. The state repression of religious practice led to a 'domestication of religion', that is, a withdrawal of religious practice from the public to the private, "from outside the home to its interior" (Dragadze 1993:150).
12. There is a difference between repressive states in which the population forms underground movements and organised resistance, and the case of the Soviet Union, where citizens did not know whom to trust and who could inform on them. While there certainly existed underground movements in the Soviet Union as well, for example in the form of catacomb churches in Western Ukraine, my point is, however, that the systematic use of informers not only made people suspicious to the state, but also to their fellow citizens. In other forms of repressive states, citizens might develop strong feelings of solidarity and common destiny of injustice, crucial, as I see it, for the development of powerful underground movements. I maintain that such solidarity did not develop in Soviet society, since everyone could be a potential threat, as an informer and a competitor for scarce goods. It did, however, contribute to strong solidarity and trust between people *within* personal networks. Stalin's

- propaganda apparatus targeted this solidarity as well, by the famous story of Pavlik Morozov, the 14-year old boy who was glorified for denouncing his own parents.
13. Her attempt at providing such theory has been criticised, though, for homogenising the complexities of everyday life by taking too much of a macro view. Finn S. Nielsen objects to the notion of 'global socialism', that so-called socialist societies all over the world have some common reality (Nielsen 1999). In Verdery's defence it should be noted that she puts forward an ideal theoretical model, merely pointing at 'family resemblances', and has no ambition to find an all-encompassing model for 'actually existing socialism'. As she notes in the introduction of her book: "No socialist country was 'typical'; each had its specificities, and each shared certain features with some but not all other countries of the bloc. To assume that conclusions drawn from one will apply to all would be unwise, but material from any of them can nevertheless raise questions that might prove fruitful elsewhere" (Verdery 1996:11).
 14. Janine Wedel (1986, 1992) describes a similar phenomenon in socialist Poland, known as *zalatwić sprawę*, which means to 'arrange/settle matters'. She defines *zalatwić sprawę* as acquiring 'goods or services provided by the formal structure, often using informal means' (Wedel 1986:41).
 15. Whereas Gregory views gifts and commodities as a binary pair, Marshall Sahlins (1988) views them as situated at different places in a scale of reciprocity, determined by the social distance between the actors (*ibid*:191-6). At one end of the continuum, which he calls 'generalised reciprocity', transactions are altruistic and the relationship between the transactors is social. At the opposite end, called 'negative reciprocity', transactions are aimed at maximising one's own utility at the expense of others, and therefore unsocial. In between these two extremes we find 'balanced reciprocity', that is, a direct exchange of objects where the transactors are 'quits' after the transaction.
Arjun Appadurai (1986) even goes a step further when he claims that the separation of gifts and commodities is altogether exaggerated. He rather looks at the "commodity potential of all things", that is, any 'thing' can, in its social life, have a feature of exchangeability (*ibid*:13).
 16. Like Gell, David Cheal (1988) also disagrees with Gregory's notion that gifts are inalienable. He points out that alienability is in fact a precondition for gifts in modern western societies; the alienability of gifts is what separates them from mere loans and shared possessions. To give a gift, the giver must necessarily have possession of an alienable object, so as to renounce ownership of it, and thereby transfer the ownership to the receiver.
 17. All translations from Norwegian and Ukrainian are mine.
 18. This is a slightly paraphrased version of Colin Nye's original definition of corruption (Nye 1967:416; referred in Andvig and Fjeldstad 2001:9).

Chapter II

19. During informal conversations I collected data on some of my informants' incomes. What I found, was that official wages did not agree at all with what they actually made, i.e. unofficially. Almost all of the informants working in private enterprises received up to ten times more than their official salaries. One of the most common forms of unofficial income I noted was the use of bonuses, or what is often referred to as 'money in an envelope'. For example, an employee working in trade receives an official salary equal to the minimum wage or just above, of which he or she pay taxes. In addition, he or she receives a bonus according to the amount of sales. Receiving bonuses is not an option for state employees due to stricter requirements for accounting. The only informant who worked in the state sector did not therefore have any unofficial salary. This was not only because he did not have access to any bonuses, but also because he was not in a position to be able to demand bribes. As Klavs Sedlenieks (2003) shows in a study from Riga, the only possibility state employees have to receive 'cash in an envelope' is in the form of bribes.

Another source of informal incomes are labour migration. During the fieldwork I carried out interviews with 25 Ukrainians who had applied for work visas to Norway. The interviews were commissioned by the Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, and followed a given questionnaire. The interviews made me realise the importance of labour migration, and gave me some clues regarding the motivations to go abroad to seek work. Further, many of my informants have family members or friends that are or have been abroad working. The ombudsman of the Ukraine, Nina Karpachova, reported to parliament in 2003 that a minimum of five million Ukrainians were working abroad (Karpachova 2003). Working abroad is therefore a vital source of income for a large portion of Ukrainian households. In just one region of the Ukraine alone, labour immigrants sent home about 100 million US dollars annully, or 4-6 thousand dollars per person (*ibid*). Men mostly go to Russia, Poland, Portugal, and Germany and work in construction, while women often go to Italy to work as housekeepers. Two informants worked in Italy during part of my fieldwork, while one worked in Poland and Germany.

20. I conducted a survey of a household's total expenses during a month. The household consisted of four persons, two adults and two children, me included. I categorised different expenses into necessary (food, medicine, hygiene articles, clothes etc), fixed (both consumption independent: gas, water, heating; and consumption dependent: electricity) and other expenses (telephone, transport, entertainment etc). The necessary expenses amounted to 1340 hryvny (\$260) and the fixed to 240 hryvny (\$46) for one month. Even in a household in which both adults have regular work, they will not be able to cover such expenses with two average official wages
21. "Halfies...are people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage" (Abu-Lughod 1991:137, referred in De Soto 2000:74).

Chapter III

22. I will use the forms as they here stand, and not confuse the reader with different case endings. *Svoi* (свої) is the plural and nominative case of *svij* (свій), and *chuzhyj* (чужий) is a masculine singular in the nominative case.
23. The picture is not as black and white as described here. There is a lot of socialising in public places, and at religious holidays like Christmas you can see people, mostly the elderly, coming together at the main street to sing Christmas carols.
24. Katherine Verdery (1996) compares the discourse on the 'mafia' with that of witchcraft: "...talk of mafia is like talk of witchcraft: a way of attributing difficult social problems to malevolent and unseen forces." (ibid:220).
25. *Zhydy* (жиди) is the nominative plural form of *zhyd* (жид), while *moskali* (москалі) is the nominative plural of *moskal'* (москаль).
26. *Kumstvo* is a close and valued relationship between the Godparents and the parents of a child; see next chapter.

Chapter IV

27. *Mis'ko* is a diminutive form for *Mykhajlo*.
28. Literally '*Kum* should live with *kuma*, as brother with sister' ('Кум з кумою повинні жити, як брат із сестрою').
29. An alternative form is to address strangers as *pan* for males and *pani* for females and then the first name, thus *pan Roman*. During the Soviet Union strangers were called *tovarysh*, or friend, and then either the first or last name, a rather paradoxical fact if we consider the atomisation and hostility towards strangers in the Soviet society, described in chapter two.

Chapter V

30. The Ukrainian word for vodka.

Chapter VI

31. Medical healthcare is by law free of charge in Ukraine.
32. Jeff Weintraub (1997) notes that acting 'discreetly' means "acting in a way that is not really hidden but also not flaunted, so that it is known but not officially 'visible' – which every culture develops in its own unique way" (ibid:6; note 8).
33. Being connected to historical facts, the further analysis does not have any empirical evidence on which to draw any final conclusions.
34. Children in Ukraine are given presents under the pillow at St. Nicholas Day (*Den' Svyatoho Mykolaya*), and not at Christmas, as is the tradition in European countries and America (Carrier 1995).

Chapter VII

35. One of my informants thus said that during the hyperinflation in the 90s, the most stable currency was a bottle of *horilka*.

Chapter IX

36. Paragraph 368 of the Criminal Code says that the punishment for taking *khabar* is fines and depriving of freedom for a period of two till five years (*Kryminal'nyj Kodeks Ukrajinu*). When the size of the *khabar* is large, or the official receiving it is in a position with great responsibility, the punishment is five till twelve years. According to paragraph 369, givers of *khabar* are punished with fines or limiting of freedom for two till five years, or if repeated, from three till eight years (*ibid*). The giver can be released from criminal responsibility if a *khabar* was demanded by an official or if the giver voluntarily notifies the authorities about the violation.
37. Both President Yushchenko and Prime-Minister Tymoshenko have thus been criticised for their previous affiliation with the corrupt Kuchma regime; Yushchenko was Prime-Minister in 2000 and Tymoshenko Minister of the energy department, which is considered as the most corrupt sector in Ukrainian industry. Tymoshenko has several times been accused for bribery and was even arrested in February 2001. The charges were dropped not long after Yushchenko came to power.

Conclusion

38. Distribution according to queuing is not necessarily that democratic after all, because *time*, the main resource invested in queuing, is unequally distributed. For an unemployed, queuing is probably less of a sacrifice, than for a worker who gets paid according to the amount of work done. Further, 'jumping the queue' is not regarded as corrupt when it is institutionalised in bureaucratic services by different rates. Losha could thus 'officially' jump the queue if he paid double.

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